ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Kain

by Max Brand

The Story of a Wrecked Revenge

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The December 9th issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY—the most popular all fiction weekly in the world today—marks the fortieth anniversary of its publication.

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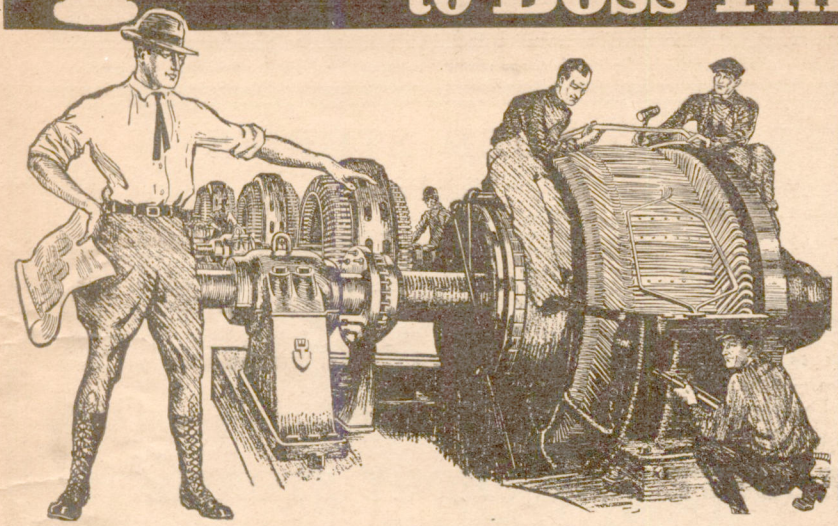

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLVII — CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 2, 1922 — NUMBER 4

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OUR FORTIETH BIRTHDAY

WITH THE NEXT ISSUE, DECEMBER 9th, THIS MAGAZINE COMPLETES THE FORTIETH YEAR OF ITS EXISTENCE.

TARZAN AND THE GOLDEN LION

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

BEGINS AS A SERIAL. NEED WE SAY MORE?

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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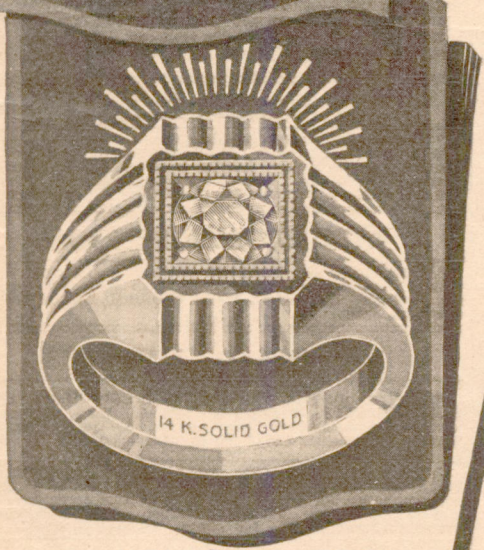

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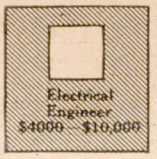

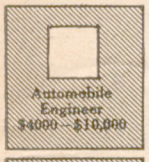

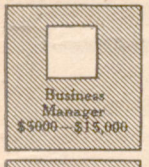

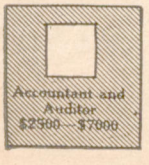

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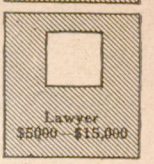

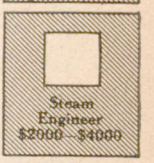

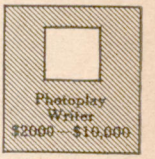

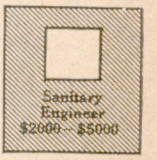

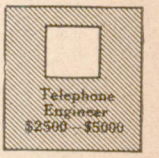

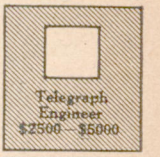

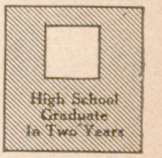

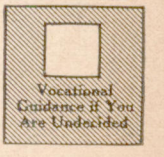

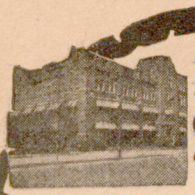

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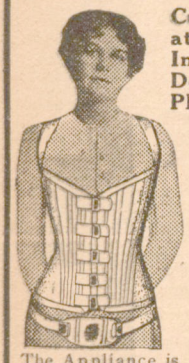

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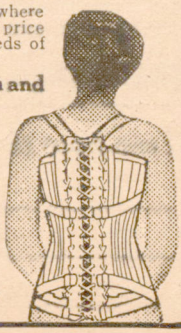

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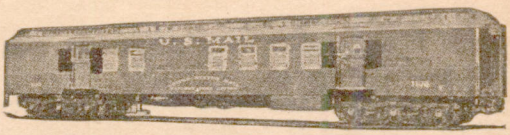

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXLVII SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1922 NUMBER 4

Kain

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Night Horseman," "Black Jack," "The Seventh Man," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HE DRINKS WITH A THIEF.

THE thick shoulders of Bud Gainer, his shaven bullet head and the outthrust of the lower jaw, suggested the pugilist, and now he sat forward on the edge of his chair like a prizefighter eager to rise for the last round. His hair was flecked here and there with gray, but since age had not visibly impaired his body, it seemed that time had only served to make him more dangerous through experience.

As for Kain, he was one of those men who easily merge with a crowd; indeed, he fitted quite accurately that nonexistent generality—the average man. Yet, when any one looked more closely, there was that about him which arrested the attention and roused conjecture. It was easy to read Bud Gainer and assign him a place, but the peculiar power of Kain was to rouse a question whose answer was deferred.

For instance, though by the usual signs he was not more than thirty years old, very few men were willing to conjecture his age. A portrait painter would have presented him in neutral colors with the stronger

light on the lower part of the face while the quandary of the eyes was left in puzzling shadow. He sat now in a relaxation so complete that it threw the aggressiveness of the man with the cap into high relief.

"There ain't any way of doubting that you've got this doped to a fare-thee-well," said Bud Gainer, "but every plant don't make a haul. How'm I to be sure, for instance, that this gent with the gray overcoat and the black neckcloth will walk all the way from the station to Albemarle Heights. He'll have the price of a taxi if he's got a front like that."

"Some men walk because they have to walk," answered Kain, "but a good many walk because they're expected to ride."

The man with the cap pulled it more firmly over his eyes as one who will not be talked down.

"That sounds fancy," he remarked, "but it don't mean much."

Kain eyed him without the least ill-nature.

"The same type of man," he reflected, "makes a point of familiarity with servants; he shakes hands with workingmen and jests with them. Such a man," he went on, losing himself in the enthusiasm of analysis, "tries to humanize himself by being ultrasimple. At the best he passes for a kindly soul; at the worst he successfully deceives himself."

Bud Gainer showed signs of aggressive discontent during this interlude.

"What I want," he said, and he dropped his fist on his knee, "is facts! The turkey without the trimmings will do me."

The eyes of Kain brightened and narrowed so that they seemed for the first time fully aware of the other. They were not unusual eyes in size or in their gray color, but in expression they varied continually with a barometric sensitiveness. A moment before they dwelt past and around the man with the cap rather than directly on him; now they focused with such sudden directness that Bud Gainer straightened a little and returned the glance with a frown.

"You eat at my table," said Kain, "and you take your turkey exactly as I serve it to you. All you need to know is that the man with the gray overcoat and the black neckcloth will dismount from the ten o'clock train, check his bag, and start for Albemarle Heights down Turner Road. Follow him.

"At the point where the road twists up directly toward the heights, cover him with your gun. He will not make the least resistance. While you are going through his pockets I shall run at you from the side and fire two blank cartridges. You will turn, shoot once well above my head, and then take to your heels. Then you will come straight back to this house, open the door with the key which I have provided, and wait for my return."

"And how do I know," said Bud Gainer, with a sullenness which proved that he acquiesced in the plans—"how do I know that the old gent won't have a cannon handy and take a try with it when I tell him to hoist his mitts? How do I know all this game is going to run so smooth?"

Kain answered: "There is no more chance of failure than there is danger that the sun will rise at midnight. However, ask your questions."

And his expression became once more half genial and half blank.

"It ain't hard to see with half an eye," said Gainer, "that you're an old-timer. Maybe a scratcher, or a baron, or a stone-getter." He nodded and chuckled at his own penetration. "But what I'd like to know is why you're pulling this old gag on the gent with the gray Benjamin. If he ain't blind he'll see that the whole thing is a fake and hand you the ha-ha."

"If any other persons than Bud Gainer and Kain were concerned in it he probably would, for I suppose that no one in the world has a much more accurate eye than this same man with the black neckcloth. But you and I shall not fail. Within three hours, Gainer, I shall have my introduction and you will have your five hundred."

"Which ain't no particular reason for using my name so free. My moniker ain't coin to pass about," said Gainer. "Here's another little thing, bo. After I've turned the trick how do I know that you'll kick through with the jack?"

"Just how you know that I can't tell," said Kain, "and you'll have to ask yourself that question."

The man with the cap took it off, turned it in his hands with a scowl that softened to a smile, and a smile that broadened to a grin, and at last to a deep, harsh chuckle.

"By God," he concluded, "you *are* cool, partner. Maybe you'll tell me where you've worked and what names you've worked under; and where did you first get the dope on me?"

Now Kain was a man who seldom smiled, but at these three questions in close volley a twinkle came in his eyes and remained there as long as the flash of a lantern swinging far off down some forest path.

"All right," nodded Bud Gainer. "Of course you don't have to talk, but why does one of the profession like you want to pull a has-been like this fake hold-up?"

"The best plays are the ones which have been on the stage the longest," said Kain. "An old trick like this wouldn't work with a small-town man, but the gentleman in the gray overcoat is himself so clever that he doesn't suspect others of being trite."

"Fancy again," growled Bud Gainer uneasily, "and a bit too damned fancy to suit a plain man like me; but I begin to get your drift and I guess you've got the dope."

"In the meantime it's close to train time, and you'd better go to the station to meet your man."

"Right; but it's windy out and there's a long job ahead. Got a drink handy?"

"By all means," nodded Kain, and taking from the sideboard a flask of handsome proportions together with a glass and a siphon, he placed them before his guest.

"Fancy again," said Bud Gainer scornfully, pushing the siphon away, "but I take mine straight."

"A good Scotch habit," remarked Kain. "And where's yours?"

"It's exactly an hour earlier than I ever start drinking, but if you wish—" And he filled a glass with seltzer.

"Well, booze don't make money," said Bud Gainer, "but I'd rather be happy than rich." He flashed a glance of both curiosity and contempt toward Kain and added: "Here's in your eye, partner."

"Your very good health," said Kain gravely, and he drank with the thief.

Bud Gainer started to leave, but with his hand on the knob of the half-opened door he turned again.

"What I'd like to know," he asked earnestly, "is: was you born this way or did you make yourself over?"

The glance of Kain thrust in that sudden, prying way toward the criminal.

He answered in a voice even lower than usual: "Whatever I may be I was made to be—by force of circumstances."

"Seems to me," chuckled Gainer, "that I've heard that before." But since the eye of Kain once more was looking carelessly, almost blankly, beyond his guest, the thief closed the door with a bang and disappeared into the windy night.

Yet Kain remained unmoving for a long moment, the half-emptied glass of seltzer still in his hand.

"By force of circumstance?" he repeated, half in query, and then with a strong gravity: "So help me God!"

Afterward, as if irritated to find himself still in this somber mood, he shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the emotion with instant ease. He was humming when he set about changing his Tuxedo for street clothes. A few moments later, clad in a rough, light-colored tweed which exaggerated his tanned skin, he in turn passed the door and ventured into the night.

CHAPTER II.

HE WALKS IN THE NIGHT.

IT was one of those rare times in May when the wind tugs strongly at coats and snatches hats down the street, yet the air is balmy, and its soft touches on the face lighten the heart with a vague happiness.

As he stepped from his garden to the street, Kain paused a moment, facing directly into the gale, and by degrees his glance rose to Albemarle Heights, from no part of the city more imposing than from Kain's house. There were not many lights in the mansions which ridged the Heights, which made their black outlines more impressive against the dull steel-gray of the sky.

In particular one house held the attention of Kain, for it stood on the greatest elevation of Albemarle Heights and it was

by far the largest of the dwellings, towering like some baronial stronghold above the city. In the very top of this house were a few lights so dim and far away that at first they seemed to Kain to belong to the host of yellow stars.

He turned from his gate now, and set out at a brisk pace, leaning straight into the arms of the wind and walking with a more powerful and elastic step than could have been expected from his somewhat frail proportions. Perhaps his strength was that nervous energy which stocks up in some men like electricity in storage batteries, a vitality slowly accumulated and spent in surprising bursts.

He was almost at once under the trees of Albemarle Park with the wind making a great moaning through the branches above him, and now he came to a point where the Turner Road made its sharp turn and swept up the face of Albemarle Heights in generous curves. Here he drew back into the shelter of a broad-trunked tree.

He had not long to wait. A tall figure strode around the curve, followed by a thick-set figure who at this moment broke into a run, planted himself in front of the first man, and presented a gleaming revolver. The other threw his hands above his head, so high that in comparison with the thief he seemed a giant about to beat an enemy into the ground; Kain drew an automatic and ran toward them. At his first shot the thief jumped back and fired in reply; at his second shot Bud Gainer turned around and raced off among the trees. Kain drew to a panting halt beside the tall man.

"Did he get anything?" he asked.

The man of the black neckcloth, who seemed not in the least discomposed, drew his watch from a vest pocket and weighed it in his hand with a chuckle.

"No, Mr. Thief was searching for my wallet and he didn't waste time on trifles." He added as if in afterthought: "Very decent of you to help me out so promptly. Very! There are some things in my wallet I shouldn't like to miss even for a short time."

Kain put up his gun.

"Nervy devil," he remarked, "to try his game on a main thoroughfare. Good night to you, sir."

The tall man called him back.

"We mustn't part as casually as this," he said. "May I walk on a way with you?"

"As a matter of fact," answered Kain, "I'm merely strolling about; lead on and I'll follow."

"Good," said the tall man. "I'm going up to the Heights and I'll be happy to have you with me. Besides, my friend the thief might come back at me, and I'm not armed."

"An excellent reason," nodded Kain, and he started out at the side of the other, quickening his pace with something of an effort to match the long strides of his companion.

"My name—" began he of the neckcloth.

But Kain cut in with a soft laugh.

"We're all an odd, conventional lot, aren't we?" he said. "I perform a slight service for you, you give me your card, I give you mine; we call upon each other, we dine together, we discuss the signs of the times and politics, we reduce each other to a few notations and file away the card in a mental index. Now, my tall friend, why the devil should we dull the edge of this rather stimulating meeting in the dark by passing through all the old formalities?"

The big man seemed to consider this for a time, quickening his pace like a man in thought. At length he chuckled.

He said: "This is a novel way of meeting an introduction, but if you wish to remain Mr. Z while I am Mr. X, by all means have it your own way."

And he chuckled again.

"I hope you won't take me for an eccentric," said Kain, "but you'll admit that a ship you pass in the night is far more interesting than one you see in port and can tell the tonnage, the horse power, and all that."

"Quite correct," said Mr. X, and he laughed again much after the manner of one who keeps a pleasant secret, but as they passed under a street lamp he turned, shortening his step, and stared fixedly at his companion. "At least," he went on, "I shall remember your face."

"It means nothing," answered Kain,

" because I leave town in a few days and will never be here again; we shall not meet, Mr. X."

" I am sorry for that," rejoined Mr. X, " because the longer I hear you talk, the more I wish that we might have an opportunity for an extensive chat."

" Chat away," said Kain. " There is nothing I enjoy more."

" I mean—" said the other, and then stopped short.

" Exactly," said Kain. " You mean a talk to begin with an exchange of credentials, continue through a search for mutual friends, and conclude with mental indigestion."

" Come, come!" said the tall man, with a touch of irritation. " In a moment I shall be accusing you of cleverness. But, to be frank, Mr. Z, there is that about you which—"

Since he paused again to fill in this difficult sentence, Kain suggested: " It is the darkness, Mr. X. That and that alone. So, if it does not displease you, I shall go on with you to your destination and then part from you under the danger of being imputed a clever man."

" I'm afraid," said Mr. X, " that the word ' clever ' carries differing connotations to us."

" I think not," answered Kain. " I knew a baker, a well-read, thoughtful fellow, and an excellent pastry chef. Undoubtedly he knew a good deal for a cook, and having surprised one or two people with his attainments, he fell into the habit of surprising others. He knew just enough about culture to despise it, and he grew into a cynic —one of those fellows who make remarks that start an argument, and then refuse to argue.

" He used to laugh at people who said that the law of gravity explains the movements of the heavenly bodies, for my friend the baker would say: ' Call it gravity, call it flub-dub; the important thing is, what *is* the attraction between bodies? Is it electrical? What generates it? What maintains it?' This same baker affected a vast distaste for the boundaries and restrictions of civilization. He was fond of telling how he once went far off into the South Seas and had the steamer put him ashore on a little island which appeared on no charts. Yet the first thing he found there was a barbed-wire fence. I take it, Mr. X, that this baker had the sort of cleverness of which you would accuse me?"

The deep, pleasant laughter of the tall man came booming out again, and the cliff above them threw the sound back in murmurs.

" I only meant to touch you," he said, " and you have put a club in my hand. The analysis embarrasses me." And as they were now under another lamp, he favored his companion with a second glance, even more searching than the first. " But I wish more than ever," he concluded, " that you would tell me more about yourself."

" I am very willing," answered Kain. " All that I wish is to keep out of a social catalogue. As for the rest, sir, why, what does any man know less of and chatter more about than himself? At one time I believed that only men under thirty discussed themselves; now I see that older men are comparatively silent simply because they no longer have the courage to face the problem."

" A triumph of laziness?"

" Or of cowardice," said Kain.

The other started.

" By the Lord," he murmured, " that's a rapier thrust! Well, suppose you tell me your main interest, my cynical friend?"

" You might call me a student," said Kain.

" Ah! A student of what?"

" Of the art of living."

" Good again. You follow the quest of the worth-while in life—a sort of seeker after the Holy Grail."

" Or a Don Quixote jousting at phantoms."

Mr. X laughed in his kindly way.

" At least," he said, " you seemed armed impregnably, and I'm afraid that I should never be able to qualify as your Cervantes."

" However," answered Kain good-naturedly, " I give you food for laughter. Confess, now, that the helmet I put on seems to you to be made of tin."

" My dear fellow," said Mr. X apologetically, " everything we fail to understand

makes us either laugh or grow angry. I take it for granted that you'd rather amuse me than irritate me."

"Hardly," said Kain, "for if I angered you I should be sure that I had made an impression, but a thing that amuses you is a chapter which you close forever with your laughter."

"Perhaps you're right. Laughter's an end in itself."

He brooded upon the suggestion for a time.

"The art of living," he said at length. "After all, it *is* an art. What do you chiefly aim toward?"

"Variety," said Kain, "and illusions."

"Illusions? I hardly can conceive of a sharp-minded fellow like yourself systematically hunting for illusions. But if you want 'em, go into business, my friend. You will find plenty of them there, I imagine. Yes, to my thinking, the world is filled with illusions."

"I can't agree with you," said Kain. "Illusions? No—it is a world of machinery and fact. Surely the greatest tragedy that can come to a man is the knowledge that to-morrow will be like to-day. Think of it! If you and I knew that the next ten years would be no better than the last ten, we would blow out our brains. Reasonably we know that the next ten *will* be like the last ten. Still, there is the dream of something new, some turn of the road, some undiscovered country."

"This is a new rendering of the fable of Pandora," remarked Mr. X.

"Yes; the Greeks generally hit off in a beautiful way what we express in the ugliest and most labored manner. They knew there was nothing after death; they concentrated on the art of living, and mastered it more nearly than any race before or since; but all their art serves to merely palliate the truth that happiness is only hope—illusion.

"We are continually on the run, Mr. X, fleeing from yesterday, dodging to-day, and chasing to-morrow. That's why I make a profession of hunting for illusions. I snatch at happiness like a thief and run away before truth finds me out. I see the apple and admire it on the tree, but I refuse to taste it because I know it will turn to ashes, and I don't want to be choked with soot."

"A philosophy of weakness and escape," remarked Mr. X. "But you are young, my friend, and before long you'll accept the world as it is and admit that it is slowly progressing on the upward road."

"Progressing?" exclaimed Kain, with such emotion that all he had said before seemed idle chatter. "Why, sir, how have we progressed since Pericles or Elizabeth? Once man could find an escape from reality through the arts, but now there are no arts. Our nearest approach to the creation of an illusion is some machine for annihilating time and space, something which takes us up in the air or plunges us down in the sea.

"Yes, it is always the body that science is concerned with. It feeds the body better, clothes it better, takes it here and there swiftly and easily, but what has our scientific world done for the mind? Do we think better? Do we build deeper philosophies, paint better pictures, write more beautiful poetry? Have we made a single important contribution to the truly indestructible element in civilization—the world of beauty? Can we even worship God with an undivided mind? Nonsense, sir! We have a thousand new ways of filling the belly, but for the mind we have substituted a machine. Progression? Well, Mr. X, you may have your progression and I shall continue to hunt for illusions."

"Dodging the truth?" asked Mr. X with some asperity. "Meeting men in the night and running away from them?"

"Exactly. The uncompleted picture is the one which holds the imagination. I finish it for myself later on. The uncompleted acquaintance is the man who becomes a part of you."

"But never a friend," said Mr. X.

"How many friends have you made in your life—true friends—men to whom you can open the inner doors of your mind?"

There was a moment of silence.

"One," said Mr. X sadly at length.

"And perhaps even that man has a price?"

"God knows," said the tall man; "not I!"

"We have grown as violently serious as Puritans," said Kain.

"But you see the talk has helped us up the hill," said Mr. X, "and here we are at the top already. I should like to hear more of your conclusions on life and man. I have not talked like this—"

"Since your boyhood?" suggested Kain.

"Ah," chuckled Mr. X, "you are inimitable! Yes, not since my college days. But, come—what is your next topic?"

"If you insist on making a false prophet of me," said Kain good-naturedly, "at least supply me with a topic."

"Certainly. Let me see. Well, why not take the nearest at hand—myself. What have you made of me during our walk in the night?"

"I shall venture on them for your amusement alone. I would say in the first place that you are a thoughtful rather than a practical nature."

"Good! Good!" muttered Mr. X, chuckling in his familiar way. "And how do you attain to that point?"

"Very simply. My aphorisms would have reduced any hardheaded business man to disgust and silence. They amuse you, which proves that you get at whatever crumbs of truth are scattered among my words."

"A hard mental diet, but since I thrive on it I prove myself an intellectual Spartan. Eh, Mr. Z?"

"I knew you would have your laugh out of that," said Kain. "As to your position in life, I presume you are a teacher of some sort."

"And why is that?"

"Because teachers in their profession have to talk so much that they welcome any opportunity to hear others chatter in even a foolish manner. And you are an excellent and most patient listener, sir."

"Good again! Very good again. A teacher?"

"Perhaps I'm flying wide of the mark. At least, you see I have the courage to voice my convictions."

"Well, then, I'm a teacher?"

"Of moderate means—probably a tutor in one of the great houses on the Heights."

"Well, well! And how is that?"

"Only the well-to-do have houses up there, of course, and if you were in that class you would be in a taxi at this hour of the night. However, you are bound for the Heights at such an hour that I must conclude that you live there. It is clear, therefore, that you live in one of those houses and serve there in some dignified capacity—say as a tutor."

Mr. X rubbed his hands together in pleasure.

"It's a treat," he declared, "to hear such close reasoning. Shall I tell you exactly what I am?"

"You're so willing to speak," said Kain, "that I see my guess has flown awry. Perhaps you're a butler rather than a tutor. Let it go. You retain the mystery of your own identity; I leave you with an interesting hypothesis. And so, Mr. X, good night to you and very happy dreams."

They were now directly in front of that most imposing residence which towered high above even the lofty buildings along Albemarle Heights.

"A moment—wait half a moment!" protested Mr. X. "At least my influence with the butler gives me access to the larder of this house, and if you'll come in I'll promise you a bite of cold meat and an excellent bottle of wine before you go back to the city. We've had a stiff walk up the hill."

"Thank you," said Kain, "but I've talked myself into such good humor that I need no wine, and I'll save my appetite until I get home. Good night again, Mr. X."

"The devil take it!" cried the tall man. "I will not lose you in this way. However"—as if he changed his mind—"perhaps you're right. I don't like to part in such a summary manner, yet if you insist on continuing the part of the Spartan, farewell, Mr. Z."

CHAPTER III.

HE PAYS THE THIEF.

BUT Kain was already so far down the slope that he hardly heard the last words of Mr. X, and he maintained a brisk pace until he turned a corner of

the big building, a foundation raising the house from the first down-pitch of the hill and as massive as the buttress of a cathedral, rising to a considerable distance before it was pierced by any window. Around the edge of the wall the wind roared with ominous voice, but the angle of the building protected Kain from the draft.

He lighted a cigarette and inhaled the smoke in long puffs. The occasional glow drew his face out of the night, etching it roughly in splotches of gray and utter black, and it appeared by this crude illumination deeply drawn and haggard, as of one who has just completed a period of intense physical and mental stress and now for the first time allows himself to relax.

Having smoked the cigarette to the very tip, he tossed the butt aside and took his way down the hill with a step less jaunty than the one with which he had mounted. Now he struck straight across the park, while the wind supported him from behind and helped on his progress; in spite of which aid he reached the door of his house at length with short and weary steps.

At the entrance he paused a moment and faced about into the wind, drawing deep breaths as if he sought to borrow needed vitality from the force of the gale; then he turned into the house humming softly, turned the switch which lighted the living room, and found there, ensconced in the most comfortable chair, Bud Gainer. Kain drew several bills from his wallet and passed them to the thief in silence.

"I suppose that ends our affair," he said, and slipped down into a corner of the davenport. His body was relaxed. His arm lay languidly at his side, the fingers trailing down over the edge of the cushion. Only his eye was indomitably alert.

Bud Gainer counted over the money carefully and examined each bill suspiciously; then he pocketed the parcel and regarded Kain with a gradually spreading grin.

"It ain't the end," he announced. "It's only a small-sized beginning."

Kain lighted a cigarette, and now he regarded the burning end with deep attention. He said, without raising his eyes from this study: "I am very tired. If you must talk, be brief."

"Speed's my middle name," said the thief. "Your game was pretty, all right, and maybe I wouldn't of tumbled, bo, if I hadn't of recognized your bird. I didn't while I was working on him, but on my way back I remembered something out of a newspaper and I stops and says to myself: Robert Stanley Raeburn—no other but him!"

"Right," nodded Kain. "He's Robert Stanley Raeburn."

"Sure, I'm right. That's why I say this ain't more'n a beginning of our acquaintance. The first five hundred is O. K.; five hundred more 'll just about start things going, maybe!"

Since Kain made no answer to this approach, Gainer continued: "There'll be plenty to split both ways. Well, who'd of thought we'd ever get chummy like this!"

Kain looked up at him at last. So a student studies a strange form of germ life under the microscope, and Gainer stirred under this impersonal gaze.

"Oh, I know you're smooth," he said. "Didn't I see you work when you got me clear of the dicks back in the big noise? If you could work the dicks you can work old R. S. Raeburn for a pot of coin. And that's why I hang around till you split fair and square."

Kain sighed.

"Look here!" broke out Gainer impatiently. "Ye ain't going to have no trouble. I know you're one of us for all your fancy ways. I only want you to whack up even. That's all. But don't try to pull the wool over my eyes. Kain, I *know* you. Why, bo, nobody but an old-timer could shoot the way you do. Look here!"

He touched a little red mark in the center of his forehead.

"That second blank had something in it, and that something hit me here. Good shooting. Kain, a damned sight *too* good. I ask you again: do you whack up or do I have to find Robert Stanley Raeburn and blow your game?"

"You will find him in the house of Charles Stirling," said Kain.

Gainer drew a long breath.

"You think you got him fixed so he won't listen to me?"

"Not at all. I left him ready to believe anything about me."

"But you don't think I'd blow on you?"

"No, for two reasons."

"Go ahead. I got all night to listen."

"You need only five minutes. The first reason is that it won't harm me if you tell him. He would be only all the more interested in a man who would arrange such a unique way of reaching an introduction."

The face of Gainer grew blank. He shook his head and then concentrated a scowl upon his host.

"All right," he growled. "We'll call that reason number one. What's the second reason?"

"It's still simpler. You're afraid to double-cross me, my friend."

While the word "afraid" left his guest agape, Kain rose from his seat, deliberately turned his back on Gainer, and flipped the ashes from his cigarette into a bronze bowl. He resumed his place, putting the bowl beside him.

"'Afraid'?" quoted Gainer, stupefied. Then he exploded: "'Afraid'!"

"Gainer," said Kain. "I'm probably the most patient man you've ever had dealings with, but just now I'm too weary to listen to you. Leave the house."

The thief smiled with contained malice.

"It's your own hangout," he said, "and you're the main kick in it, all right. Sure, I'll leave, but you'll hear from me again. 'Afraid'!"

He started for the door with the last word prolonged to a snarl on his lips.

"Come back," said Kain without raising his voice.

The other turned with obvious relief.

"I knew you wouldn't play the bluff clear out," he said. "But it's a treat to hear you work, old boy. I'm saying that free."

"Do you suppose I would have used you," said Kain, "if I didn't know enough to tie your hands when I'm through with you? Gainer, there are certain things in your life which even your crooked friends don't know about you. There are things which even your pal Louie hasn't dreamed of. But if they should be known—if they should be even whispered abroad—ah, Gainer, that would be too bad, indeed!"

"What do you know?" said the thief with bulging eyes.

"Everything," said Kain.

Gainer started to speak, but no words came. He moistened his white lips, and with his eyes fastened upon Kain like a child watching a venomous snake, he backed toward the door, snatched it open, and leaped sidewise out into the night.

CHAPTER IV.

HE SHOWS A PICTURE.

IN that mood of absolute quiescence which was often his, Kain sat on the veranda the next afternoon and watched the sun gild the distant trees of Albemarle Park or splash the windows of the mansions on the Heights with blinding gold. For it was the hour of the afternoon when the rays, growing slant, take on a tint of yellow, but lose almost all meaning of warmth.

Little by little shadows lengthened across the street and now blurred the brilliant geraniums of the hedge with a film of blue. A time half lazy, half mysterious, hushed. The children have already returned to their homes from school; the world waits for the cool of the evening. Kain listened to the hum of the lawn mower slowing to a loud clatter as the machine slackened at the corners.

It was pushed by an old gardener, his black hat almost gray with the mingled dust and sweat of years, and his shoulders so bowed that even when he stood most nearly straight he seemed about to stoop to the earth. He smoked a pipe with so short a stem that there seemed a perpetual danger that his whiskers would ignite in the bowl.

At this moment he stopped his mower in the midst of a swath, knocked the ashes from his pipe against his heel, and fumbled through his hip pockets. His hands came forth again, empty, and in a deep bewilderment he pushed the hat aside and drew the back of his fist across his forehead. Even this stimulus failed to help his wandering thoughts, and he looked up like a child seeking help.

"I have some pipe tobacco for you," said Kain, producing a pouch. "Come up and help yourself."

The old man considered Kain with a misty, uncertain eye, and then, climbing the steps of the porch, he took off his hat and stood at a little distance, as one who feared to intrude too far. Kain rose instantly and pushed forward a chair facing his own.

"Sit down," he said kindly.

"Sir?" asked the gardener uneasily.

"You can finish the lawn when it's a little cooler," said Kain. "Sit down and have a pipe and smoke a bit."

"Thank you, sir," said the gardener, and sitting down gingerly on the edge of the chair he looked askance to make out the meaning of this unwonted cordiality; but since Kain passed him the pouch in silence he filled his pipe mechanically and lighted it, pressing down the red ember with a calloused forefinger.

At the first breath of the smoke his eyes kindled; he removed the pipe, and from a distance watched the smoke curling from the bowl in a thin wraith. Restoring the pipe to his mouth he drew larger and larger puffs until his head was lost among clouds of bluish-white, and at length his glance reverted to Kain.

"Now, this *is* tobacco," the gardener remarked.

"It's a mixture of my own," said Kain, "and you shall have a pound to take home if you wish."

"Good tobacco," replied the gardener indirectly, "is better'n meat for me. My wife is always saying to me of an evening: 'Joe Gurfy,' she says, 'pipe and tobacco mean more to you than wife and home,' says she. And I says to Alice: 'Alice,' says I, 'it wouldn't be home without a pipe.' Which is by way of being a joke, but not all a joke at that, sir."

Kain laughed softly with understanding, and as he looked at the gardener his expression changed so much that he seemed almost a new man.

"But women, you take 'em all in all and through and through," said Joe Gurfy, "it makes 'em uneasy to see a man sitting happy and saying nothing. They like talk, mostly, and they're afraid of thinking that don't come out in words."

"For my part," answered Kain, "when you show me a silent woman, you show me a very rare person, indeed."

"And before I show you one," broke in Joe Gurfy with enthusiasm, "I'll be showing you a whole flock of white blackbirds, sir!"

"Ah," murmured Kain, "you're a fellow of experience and ought to know."

"Thirty-five years married," sighed Joe Gurfy.

"Thirty-five years!" nodded Kain. "Well, well! You don't look it!"

"I bear up fair, considering," said Joe Gurfy, "but it's sixty-two years since I first seen light and squalled at it."

"After watching you get about," said Kain, "I wouldn't put you a day over fifty."

"Wouldn't you, now," said Joe Gurfy, and he smiled broadly upon Kain. "No; I ain't looked my age for nigh onto twenty years now; but if you'd seen me once you'd know the difference now."

He made a gesture of vast meaning with both brown-knotted hands.

"Sixty-two years!" repeated Kain thoughtfully. "In this place most of the time?"

"Man and boy and baby," answered Gurfy, "sixty-two years in this same town. Why, I knew it when there wasn't twenty thousand all told by a free guess. Sixty-two years; yes, sir! Well, for thirty years I've cared for this here lawn and planted it five years. Last time was two years ago come August, but here it is looking sort of mangy already. No, sir, this ground don't bear up now the way it once done."

He shook his head in profound conviction, and while his eyes were still half closed Kain swept him with one of those probing glances—like an artist who sees something at a glance and can reproduce it in detail afterward.

Finally he said carelessly: "I found a picture in the attic the other day when I was picking about just after I rented this house. An interesting face, I thought; and if you've been so long about you may recognize the man."

He went into the house and reappeared, bearing a photograph much tattered at the edge and yellow with age; this he placed in the hands of Gurfy. At sight of it the pipe tilted up sharply between the teeth of the gardener and a shower of white ashes fluttered down upon his lap. It lay there unheeded.

"I see you know him," said Kain.

"Know him?" repeated Joe Gurfy. "Man alive, this is him that built the house you're living in!"

The first breath of the evening wind went whispering through the climbing vine, and perhaps it was the touch of this chill air which made Kain shiver. He brought out a pipe with a bowl as black as that of Joe Gurfy and began to smoke rapidly.

"Very interesting," he said. "The very man who built this house! Think of it!"

"The very man," affirmed Joe Gurfy. "David Cameron himself; God rest him!"

A silence, during which Kain smoked so furiously that his face was only faintly discernible through the blue-white cloud.

"So he's dead," he asked, his voice a little hoarse. "The man who built this house is dead?"

"This twenty years gone," answered Joe Gurfy. "Yes, he's dead, right enough."

"Well," said Kain, "I'm sorry for that. It's a comfortable little place, and it's too bad that he didn't live to enjoy it."

"Ah, man," replied Joe Gurfy, "if that was all he lost; if that was all David Cameron lost!"

And he shook his head.

"Lost more than this?" asked Kain, and though his voice did not raise there was a ring in it like steel striking lightly against steel.

"More than this? Aye, a thousand times more! Honor and money and place; and a bit of a son, and the finest woman to wife that ever I've seen. Such a girl as it done your eye good to sit looking at her, as I tell Alice many a time. I says: 'There was never no such airs to Margaret Cameron,' says I, when one of them high-headed young fillies goes past me. 'There was never no such airs to Margaret Cameron,' says I, 'but she was a plain woman, and a sweet woman, and so, God rest her, too!' says I."

"The wife of Cameron died also?" queried Kain.

"Like as not by this. She wasn't the kind to live through the shame of it. No, it ate into the heart of her, and if she lived afterward, she was dead all the time inside; dead all the time after that first day."

He removed the pipe from his mouth with a shaking hand and sat a while in profound contemplation. The seriousness of his theme dignified him. He was like a seer considering the fallen glories of a past age.

"Whatever else David Cameron did," said Kain, "he built his house well."

"Didn't he, now!" answered Gurfy. "There was a time when it was one of the finest houses in town. Yes, sir!"

"The finest in town?" said Kain. "Surely not as fine as any of those houses on the Heights."

The gardener looked up with a scowl to the bright array of mansions which soared up above Albemarle Heights.

"There was no houses on Albemarle Heights in them days," he said, "and the town didn't run no farther out than Washington Avenue. Maybe that sounds queer to you that's seen the city as it is now. No, sir. In David Cameron's days folks would come half across the town to see his house—and maybe catch a sight of Margaret Cameron in the garden here. Oh, sir, I've stood by her side when I planted that red rose that's now so big—and she patted the ground around the stem with her own hands! No, sir. In Cameron's day this was a fine place, and if he was living now his house would be up there on the Heights; and one that's up there would be no house at all, maybe!"

"This sounds like a story," suggested Kain. "Whose house do you mean?"

Joe Gurfy regarded Kain with a wistful eye of both caution and eagerness. Then he said: "Ain't it a free country? Ain't a man got a right to talk?"

"If it's a secret," said Kain, "I'm sure that I have no desire to pry."

"Secret be damned!" exploded Gurfy. "The house I mean is Charles Stirling's house. *His* side of the story is told often enough. Why shouldn't Cameron's get a hearing?"

"By all means," nodded Kain through his veil of smoke. "By all means let's hear the other side of the story."

CHAPTER V.

HE HEARS OF A WOMAN WITHOUT MERCY.

GURFY filled his pipe again from Kain's pouch, lighted it, and puffed while he marshaled his thoughts. He began: "They was three partners—Cameron and Stirling and Raeburn."

"You mean the rich man—Robert Stanley Raeburn?"

"It's him I mean," agreed Gurfy. "I remember like yesterday when he was only plain Raeburn, or R. S. Raeburn at the most. You spell all his names out slow, do you? Well, it was David Cameron that begun the business and made it and took in Raeburn and Stirling that had nothing but their damned smart tongues and their cold hearts to start 'em climbing."

"Well," said Kain, with his eyes fixed upon that greatest mansion on the Heights, "they've climbed far enough."

"The farther for them to fall!" said Gurfy fiercely. "The farther for them to fall!

"Well, Cameron had a golden tongue. Ah, lad, to hear him talk you'd forget meat and drink; and it was him brung the trade to the firm. The biggest man in the city—that's what he was; as big for his day as Charles Stirling is now.

"And all in a day he lost everything; the next he ran away with his family; in a while we heard tell that he'd drowned himself. Nobody knew all the why of it, but there was talk that he'd taken a bribe. The way they tell it still was that Cameron was offered big money to make his side of a case weak, and that he done it. Then Raeburn and Stirling heard tell of it, and seen their chance and got a witness—bought him, most like—and hounded him out of town so's they could get the business. But he was innocent, or my name's not Joe Gurfy."

"Innocent?" cried Kain, starting up from his chair. "Man, do *you* say that he was innocent?"

"And what ails you, lad?" asked Joe Gurfy in some alarm.

Kain sank back into his chair.

"Nothing at all," he said, and he gripped the arms of his chair tightly. "But to think that the man may have been driven from his home for no cause—his life ruined—his wife shamed—his boy brought up in the shadow of a disgrace, hardly daring to call his name his own, and dodging men for fear they might know his father!"

He turned suddenly upon Gurfy, crying: "What proof have you of his innocence? Give me your proofs!"

"They wouldn't count in law, maybe," said Gurfy. "But I'll tell you what I know. Charles Stirling was new married, and his wife was sick, so my Alice was piecing out about the house; for in them days there wasn't no regular servant in Stirling's house. Well, on this night Alice answers the doorbell and lets in David Cameron. He stands shakin' the rain off his hat, for it was a wild night out, and he stood looking through Alice in a way he had. Oh, lad, he had an eye that went through you like a knife!

"'I'm that sorry,' says Alice, 'but Mr. Stirling ain't at home.'

"'I know it,' says Cameron. 'Tell Mrs. Stirling I must see her.'

"So Alice went up to give Mrs. Stirling a call, and knocks at her door and goes in.

"'There's a caller for you,' says she.

"'Tell him I'm sick in bed,' says Mrs. Stirling.

"'It's Mr. Cameron,' says Alice, for that was a name in them days that would take the sick out of bed, I'm telling you! But Mrs. Stirling sort of laughs inside and says: 'Go tell him I know why he's come, but it's no use.'

"'Ma'am,' says Alice, 'it ain't no use my asking him to go. He's got something on his mind and he'll stay till it's off.'

"'Is it that way?' says Mrs. Stirling. 'Then I'll come down, but he'll be sorry I came.'

"So down she comes, and Alice knows that there's queer things up, so she hides behind a door and listens.

"'Annette,' says David Cameron, 'you know why I'm here.'

"'Charles has told me, Mr. Cameron,' she says.

"'Is it "Mr. Cameron" so soon, Annette?' says he. 'Does it only take this to change you?'

"There was a bit of quiet, and then she says: 'It seems to me that there has been enough of a change.'

"'Do you think so?' says Cameron. 'I've just left Charlie. Raeburn leaves everything to Charlie, and he leaves it to you. If you say the word they'll drop this business.'

"'Have they left it all to me?' says Mrs. Stirling. 'Then if I'm judge I've got to think of justice!'

"'Aye, and one thing more,' says David Cameron.

"'And what is that?' she says.

"'Mercy!' says David Cameron.

"She says, sort of soft and angry: 'Who taught you the word "mercy," David Cameron?'

"'Christ!' says Cameron.

"'You ask for mercy, and that shows you are guilty,' she says.

"'It shows I have a case which I might not prove in court.'

"She says: 'We only ask that you leave the town.'

"He says: 'You only ask me to give up my home and bring shame on my wife and my baby boy. Annette, have you forgotten them?'

"'I am ready to follow my husband, no matter what happens to him,' says she, 'and I thought your wife might be ready to do the same thing for you, Mr. Cameron.'"

"Did she say that?" said Kain in a faint voice. "Dear God, was that all the answer she made?"

"It was," said Gurfy, "for her heart's of ice! And when David Cameron heard her he cried out—aye, Alice says the ring of his voice is in her ears many a night!—'Annette, think of Margaret!'

"'I *am* thinking of her,' she says.

"You see, she'd never forgiven Margaret Cameron for bein' a bit better to look at and a bit more of a lady than herself. Now she has her house full of the swells, but if Margaret Cameron was back here in this little house to-day she'd take the cream of the fine folk away from Stirling House and bring 'em down here to her door! She would!"

"But you forget," said Kain softly, "that she is dead, man—she's dead!"

"But not the thought of her," said Gurfy resolutely.

"Gurfy," said Kain, "you're a good man. Go on with your story."

"There's no more to tell. When he heard that, David Cameron says: 'Good night, Annette. I'm going. But as sure as there's a sky above earth I'm coming back again!'"

"Did he say that?" cried Kain. "Did he swear that he'd come back?"

"Alice heard it, sir."

"But where's your proof of his innocence, Gurfy? Yes, let's get down to that!"

"Was his talk like the talk of a guilty, bribe-takin' hound?"

"It was not," said Kain, apparently much moved. "Your own big heart has helped you to the truth. He said that he had a case, but one which he could not prove in court. Gurfy, if he had been guilty he would have confessed everything and thrown himself on the mercy of the woman."

"He would," nodded Gurfy, "for that's human nature when a man's in trouble."

"Think of it!" said Kain. "Because of her three lives are ruined!"

"Think of Raeburn and Stirling, too," said Gurfy. "Any of 'em could of saved Cameron. But, no, they was all figurin' pretty close on how they'd get their start off of Cameron's share of the business. Well, they was right, for that was the start that put 'em where they are. But it's blood money, sir, that built that there house on the Heights! God 'll pay 'em back for it!"

"What has God to do with it?" asked Kain savagely. "Did He raise His hand to save poor Cameron? He saw poor Margaret Cameron dogged by shame. He knew that she, at least, was as stainless as snow! But think, now, of Cameron's boy. If he were brought up to think that his father was honest and that Stirling and Raeburn are cold-blooded scoundrels, what would he

think of the justice of God? Gurfy, what would he think if he sat here beside us, on the porch which his father built, and looked up to the house on the Heights which Stirling bought with blood?"

"He'd get a gun," said Gurfy fiercely, "and he'd go for Charles Stirling."

"I think not," answered Kain. "There are other ways of killing than with a gun—ways that torture more because they take longer. You said it yourself a moment ago when you told me that the heart of Margaret Cameron died when her husband ran away from the town."

"There may be ways with common men," said Gurfy, "but how could a body reach them three—so high up there? No, sir, they's no way but a gun!"

"I wonder," said Kain, and then, starting up, struck his hands violently together. "Gurfy, a house divided against itself cannot stand!"

"What was that?" asked the startled old man.

"Nothing, nothing, nothing!" cried Kain, who seemed at once to break into almost violent good humor.

He repeated under his breath: "A house divided against itself cannot stand!" And then he clapped Gurfy good-humoredly upon the shoulder.

"Let me have the picture," said Kain, and, taking the photograph, he looked upon it long and earnestly.

"At least," he said, "the face is honest. A child and a fool could see that at a glance. But even if he were guilty, Gurfy, even if he were guilty as hell, did he deserve his punishment?"

"No," cried the gardener, "because he was a kind man, sir. I've sat here on this very porch with him. He would ask after Alice. He's given me cigars and talked politics with me, and always he would say 'Mr. Gurfy' to me, and not 'Joe,' like some of the scum that I work for to-day. He was as kind a man as you, sir!"

"Kind?" repeated Kain. "It's the first time in my life, I suppose, that I've been accused of kindness. Well, well! You're nervous after your long story, Gurfy. Your hands shake a little. Come inside and we'll have a drink before you go home."

"There's the lawn to cut still," protested Gurfy as he followed Kain through the front door at a rather timid distance.

"The lawn shall wait," said Kain, and he favored Gurfy with one of his rare smiles.

The gardener stood with his feet close together on the soft rug, trying its texture cautiously with the toe of his shoe, and his abashed eye went from piece to piece of furniture. The master of the house poured out a stiff three fingers for his guest and another for himself, and then stood, glass in hand, staring down at the picture of David Cameron.

"How shall we drink it?" he asked.

"Why," said Gurfy, "I'd drink to a man that wasn't too proud to be my friend. And Joe Gurfy ain't too proud to drink to him now. Here's to David Cameron!"

"To David Cameron!" said Kain, and stiffened to his full, slender height.

When he had drunk the toast the glass slipped from his fingers and crushed in a myriad tinkling fragments on the floor. Joe Gurfy automatically stooped to his knees and started to brush up the pieces.

"Let it be," said Kain. "I will attend to it later."

"D'you know," said Gurfy with an apologetic grin as he straightened again, "it sort of seemed to me that you dropped that glass on purpose."

"Really?" said Kain.

CHAPTER VI.

HE MEETS THE WOMAN WITHOUT MERCY.

FOR two days Kain walked the streets continuously. He began late in the morning, paused for rest at noon, continued through the afternoon, appeared in some theater in the night, and afterward went to several cafés, pausing in each only long enough to take a table and make a thorough survey of the guests. He continued this restless progress throughout the third day, dressed in the same manner in the black clothes which he affected upon almost all occasions, with a small yellow blossom in his lapel and swinging a slender, yellow cane; a costume conservative enough, but

the cane and the flower caught the eye, and something in his manner drew eyes after him. He might have been a tourist interested in every detail of men and manners, for as he sauntered on he let his eye dwell on each passing face and vehicle.

It was on the afternoon of the third day as he walked through Albemarle Park, at that hour filled with the carriages and horses and automobiles of the fashionables, a combination of parade and review, when he saw a span of splendid grays drawing a low, open carriage. In it were Robert Stanley Raeburn and a woman of marked beauty.

Kain reduced his pace to a yet more casual and strolling gait; at the same time he commenced to whistle and swung the yellow cane until it flashed in the sun. An instant later there was a loud halloo beside him, and Kain halted, resting on his stick. Raeburn was leaning from the carriage, calling and beckoning to him. As he approached, Raeburn murmured something to his companion, at which she smiled frankly upon Kain. He regarded them quizzically.

"What!" cried Raeburn. "Have you forgotten me?"

"I am very sorry," said Kain gravely.

"Come, come! Remember Mr. X and the walk up the hill?"

"By Jove," cried Kain. "The butler!" And then checking himself in obvious embarrassment he smiled apologetically. The two burst into laughter.

"The very same," agreed Raeburn. "Tutor or butler—I forget which it was at the end. Mr. Z, I have told Mrs. Charles Stirling about you, and she is anxious to know you better."

"Very anxious, indeed," she said, her voice still a little shaken with laughter. "In the meantime we're holding up all manner of traffic. Won't you join us for a drive?"

"Thank you," said Kain. "It will be embarrassing, but you see that I have courage." And he stepped into the carriage and took the opposite seat, his hands folded over the top of his stick. "In broad daylight, Mrs. Stirling, my name is John Kain."

"And this is Robert Stanley Raeburn," she answered, and leaned back in her seat a little, waiting.

"Robert Stanley—" repeated Kain in amazement, and then his face lighted with understanding. "After all, Mr. Raeburn," he said, "whom will people laugh with—you or me?"

"They've been laughing *at* me ever since I've told of my adventure," said Raeburn, "and even Stirling joined in and calls me the butler. I'll wager, his first good laugh in six months, Annette?"

"Oh, longer than that," she answered. "Much longer! Mr. Kain, won't you let me carry you away for tea?"

"Thank you," said Kain, "I'm hungry. Besides, I must think up apologies."

"Please, no!" cried Mrs. Stirling. "It's the only real adventure Mr. Raeburn has ever had off the street. And he's as vain as a peacock over it. Aren't you, Bob?"

"Apologies?" queried Raeburn. "Why, sir, apologies would dull the edge of the affair. But I wonder at finding a man who flies from ennui promenading in Albemarle Park at this hour?"

"Ah," replied Kain, "you must not forget that Mr. Z named himself a student."

"No, I'll never forget any detail of Mr. Z. But what on earth do you study in Albemarle Park?"

"Means of escape from that same ennui," answered Kain.

"Can these people really teach you how to escape?" said Raeburn, gesturing to the crowd about them, before and behind.

"Each one teaches me something," said Kain. "Your coachman, for instance, is scorning every plebeian automobile he passes; he winks at them with one eye and admires his grays with the other. And yet that little withered man just passing us in his limousine is wondering at the young fools who leave themselves open to the raw air. There's a fellow whose daughters have told him that he looks well on horseback. See how he tucks his chin in and holds his crop just so, yet he daren't move his nag out of that soft trot for fear of bouncing. Look at the girl and man in the roadster. He'll wreck his car if he keeps up that snake course much longer. They would pity us all if they are able to so much as see us, which I doubt. I'll wager, Mrs. Stirling, that they are holding hands on the inside."

"Look at them, Bob," said Mrs. Stirling, "and tell me if he's right."

Raeburn leaned shamelessly over the side of the carriage.

"Mr. Kain wins," he said, sitting straight once more. "How the pair blushed when they saw me looking at them!"

"Mr. Kain," cried Mrs. Stirling, "you read the minds of people. I shall be afraid of you!"

"Why, my reputation as a mind reader is spoiled before it is well started with you," said Kain ruefully, and he turned to Raeburn with one of his unusual smiles.

"But I still fail to see what lessons you draw from such a crowd as this," said Raeburn.

"You don't?" said Kain. "You don't see that? From horses to love—why, sir, how could there be a greater range? I come here and study their methods and then try to go and do likewise. Sometimes you'd smile to learn how much it helps."

"We shall argue this at a greater length when we get home," said Raeburn.

Kain appealed to Mrs. Stirling, saying: "You see, he is continually forgetting that I am no longer Mr. Z."

The carriage had topped the winding road up the Heights, and now the wheels crunched the gravel road which wound into the court of Stirling House. It stopped before the tall entrance. Raeburn remained behind to ask the coachman a question concerning the near horse, and Kain and Mrs. Stirling went in together.

"I rely on your protection," said Kain, "for otherwise Mr. Raeburn will very shortly make me a laughing stock."

"Really, you seem quite able to take care of yourself," she answered. "It's rare to hear Bob talk with enthusiasm of any one, but Mr. Z has been on his tongue for three days. How he has laughed, and how he enjoyed that walk up the hill! He assures me that he has hardly met before with such a stimulating mind. I'll call him in, Mr. Kain, for I could never entertain you with my chatter."

"Let him be," entreated Kain earnestly. "If I have to talk with him seriously again within three weeks I'm undone."

She laughed at his solemnity.

"You see," he explained, "I once knew a cynical fellow and I took care to pick up a stock of his phrases. Whenever I'm blue I trot out the stock, and there, you understand, is the secret of the cleverness to which Mr. Raeburn referred. If he talked with me for five minutes alone now he'd pump me dry, absolutely!"

"Of course you're fibbing to set me at ease," she said, "but it's a pleasant fib and I'll take you at your word."

"Please do," he urged her, "for I'm really utterly at a loss with such men as Mr. Raeburn."

They entered a room, whose windows looked out over Albemarle Park and on to the city below, and beyond it to the broad, gleaming river. The room was tinted in ivory, the walls arching to a flattened dome above, and in a recess guarded by a columned entrance stood the piano. The place was as bright as if it were flooded even then by yellow sunlight, and yet the time was evening and all that side of the house was in shadow. Mrs. Stirling took a chair near the big windows.

"But this is ideal," said Kain, and he took a place almost exactly opposite her, but with his back to the light, so that his face was almost always in a partial shadow.

"What a tan you have!" she said. "You look almost like a man from the tropics."

"No, that's from traveling quite a bit at sea."

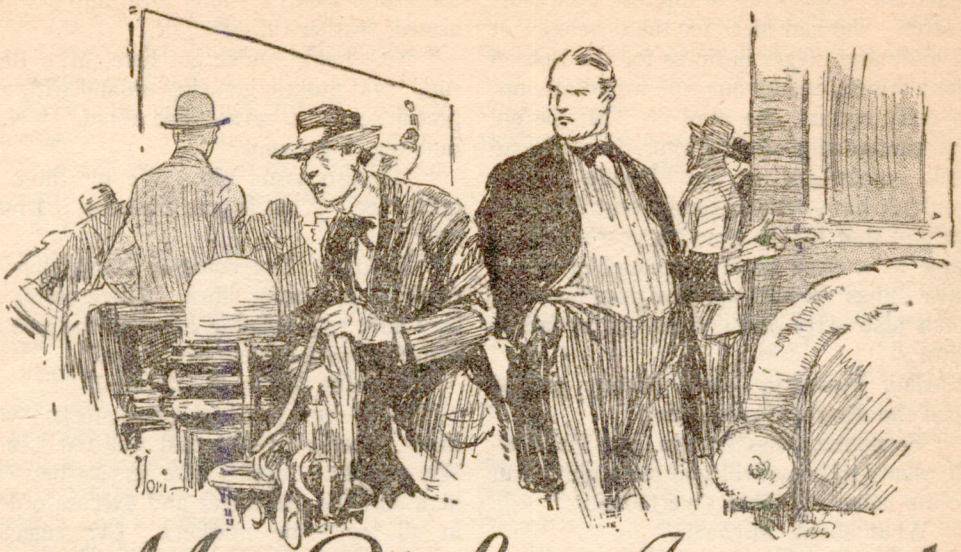
"And where is your home?"

"Really," said Kain, "I wander about so idly that you might almost call me a man without a country. Just now I'm living on the other side of Albemarle Park. I'm only in town for a few weeks."

"That's a pleasant location, isn't it, if you're within view of the park?"

"The house is close to the park, and it's a comfortable place with a good deal more room than I can use. It was built by a fellow with a taste for spaciousness. By the way, when I was wandering about the place shortly after I took possession, I came across a most extraordinary photograph. I have it with me now. I wonder if you would care to look at it?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Mr. Stokes' Account

By HENRY PAYSON DOWST

Author of "Wanted: A Bank President."

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

BEHIND a huge double-flat desk at one end of the directors' room of the Benson Bank of Templeton sat the president of that substantial institution. Ordinarily the president occupied a smaller desk out in front, where all the bank's customers could have ready and welcome access to this necessary official. But even a bank president must have some hours of privacy, and Beth Benson usually retired to the solitude of the directors' room to think out her problems.

Beth wasn't exactly a small girl, yet she looked, somehow, dwarfed by the huge desk with its broad expanse of glass-covered top. That was largely because the desk had been built for her father, old Joe, a rugged mountain of a man, now junketing at his leisure around the world in company with Beth's mother. This absence of the elder Benson accounted for the incumbency of his office and desk by his enterprising daughter—a matter still provocative of wondering discussion among the good but conservative people of Templeton. Gosh! Who ever heard of a *girl* being a bank president? Still, it had to be admitted that Beth was giving every promise of making good.

It wasn't exactly an easy chair to fill, as you may well imagine. If Beth hadn't been possessed of more than the average young woman's energy and determination she never would have got away with it; but Beth was smart; yes, sir. All Templeton agreed she was a chip of the old block, as you might say.

Beth was now engaged busily with pencil and scratch pad and interest tables. Her brow was slightly furrowed with the stress of her mental processes. She was thinking hard; but she liked it. Since her father had turned over the bank to her she had

found life, always full of interest, even more zestful. She had ideas for the development of more and bigger business for the Benson Bank which, one by one, she would attempt to carry out as time went on. Maybe old Joe, contentedly sunning himself on a broad deck somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, wouldn't have been so complacent if he had realized that by the time his year's holiday came to a close his lively daughter would have things speeded up at a pace not easy for a man sixty-seven years old to fall in with.

Mike Flannery, bank porter, pushed open the directors' room door.

" 'Scuse me, Miss Benson, but Mr. Garvin wants to know will you see a gintleman be the name iv Stokes f'r a momint."

" What about, Michael?"

" Openin' a new account, I b'lieve."

" But Mr. Garvin knows all about our rules governing the acceptance of new accounts."

" This is somethin' spicial, I guiss."

" All right, Michael. Send Mr. Stokes in."

Mr. Stokes was a youngish middle aged man, tall, rather quietly dressed and modest in demeanor. He possessed a well shaped head and an assortment of features sufficiently standard, except that his eyes were of a peculiar greenish gray, a color seen oftener in the eyes of cats than of persons. He was smooth shaven, rather well groomed, a man of sophistication and suavity.

Beth was unable to say just why a little shudder of dislike flickered into her consciousness and out again as Mr. Stokes advanced, his pale eyes lighted with friendly greeting.

" So this is the—er—famous lady financier," he hazarded, advancing to the side of the big desk. " Miss Benson, isn't it? My name is Stokes, of Stokes & Blanchard, number 23A Wall Street, New York. Maybe you've heard of us."

" How do you do, Mr. Stokes," said Beth gravely. " Won't you sit down?"

She did not inform Mr. Stokes that the name of his firm had as yet become a household word in Templeton.

" How can we serve you?" she asked, as the visitor eased his long form into a wide-armed, leather-tufted chair.

" Nice bank you've got here, Miss Benson," said Stokes, glancing around with appreciation of a rather fine room. " New building, I presume?"

" It's two years old. We all think it quite nice. What is your business, if I may ask?"

" Brokers. I've come to Templeton to establish a branch office. There seems to be a first rate opening here for the sale of high-grade investment securities."

" Meaning bonds, Mr. Stokes?"

" Why—er—yes, bonds and stocks—you know, standard listed and unlisted issues. We expect to furnish wire service between here and the exchanges and execute orders in all legitimate markets. I've engaged quarters in the Haynes Block, over Gilbert's drug store, and the workmen are already busy making alterations."

" I see," said Beth. " And did you tell your story to Mr. Garvin?"

" Yes, and lots beside what I've told you. I can furnish you with unquestionable references, of course."

" Of course," echoed the bank president. She looked very directly into the greenish gray eyes, and it didn't appear at that moment that she was so very much too small for the big desk.

" I'll tell you, Mr. Stokes," she said coolly. " Perhaps Mr. Garvin led you to think differently, but I honestly believe I shall have to decline your account."

Stokes arose hastily.

" But, Miss Benson, isn't that rather a hasty judgment? Don't you think you'd better take a little time and look us up and decide a little later? I selected your bank because it is the leader here. I want to do business with the best. I presume your competitor would be glad to have our account, but I came here first and I'm very desirous of making the right connection. You understand our deposits may run into very large figures—perhaps as high as fifty or sixty thousand dollars; and we are prepared to carry a daily balance that won't fall below three or four thousand. My initial deposit would be five thousand dollars. I hardly think you can afford to turn down

what would seem a rather attractive piece of business."

"I know," said Beth smoothly. "It does sound like a nice account to have. Still, I'm afraid my mind is made up. I don't wish to seem discourteous, and of course you think I'm unreasonable, but really, Mr. Stokes, I wish you wouldn't urge me."

"But why, Miss Benson, why?"

Stokes leaned across the wide desk, his urbane face marred by the shadow of a frown; and the greenish gray eyes held no friendly light.

"Well, Mr. Stokes, if I must be rude—if you really insist on my telling you why I won't take your account, it is because I don't think you or your firm of Stokes & Blanchard are the sort of people that should be encouraged to set up shop here in Templeton."

"Meaning that you don't believe we're on the level?"

"I didn't say that; but you may interpret my remarks to suit yourself."

"Well," snorted Stokes. "Well. That's a new one on me. Blamed if it isn't a brand new one!" He took himself off abruptly without the formality of even a "good day."

By and by Garvin come in.

"Say, Miss Benson, that Stokes was pretty sore. He went out breathing brimstone. I kind of thought—"

"You thought I'd take his business? Then why didn't you take him, without bothering me?"

Garvin grinned.

"Oh, I guess I would, if this had been some banks I could mention. But I had a hunch I better let you have a look at him."

"Thanks," said Beth. "I suppose now he'll go over to the Sands County Trust & Savings."

"Where else can he go?"

"Do you think Mr. French will pass him?"

"Will a duck swim, Miss Beth?"

"Yes, Mr. Garvin, a duck certainly will swim—he'll swim like—like a duck; every time."

"I think you can depend on that, Miss Beth," agreed Garvin, and went back to his desk.

If, curious reader, it be necessary to account for the phenomenon observed in the fact of a young and pretty girl holding down the presidency of the Benson Bank, it may be explained that she had qualified for the job by hard work. Old Joe Benson would gladly have turned it over to young Joe, but the latter had reluctantly declined it; I say reluctantly, though his hesitancy had been due to no desire for the place, but solely to escape disappointing his father. The old man had to admit, nevertheless, that running the Benson Lumber Company was about all the commercial burden he ought to impose upon his book-loving, dreaming, botanizing namesake.

So when Beth, by scouring the countryside for new accounts, by studying and suggesting and planning, by proving to her dad's satisfaction that she possessed not only the capability but a real enthusiasm, was named by the directors at old Joe's request to assume the presidency, all Templeton was first surprised, then good naturedly tolerant and finally stirred with a proud consciousness of possessing, perhaps, the only lady bank president in the country.

"I suppose," she went on, "a lot of people would think twice before declining a promising account like Mr. Stokes's. But—well, father would have turned him down, I'm sure of that."

She went back contentedly to her calculations.

II.

On the other side of the street, though not quite facing the Benson, was Templeton's newer bank, the Sands County Trust & Savings. Thither went Mr. Stokes. Almost the first desk within view of the visitor was that of Mr. Edward Chesterton French, head of the institution. His official identity was made plain by the title "President" neatly lettered on a strip of glass and fastened to the end of his desk. Near by, and within the same railed inclosure, were located other officials. This ruthless display of its managing personnel is a part of the modern bank's "scenery." The doctor or lawyer can hive up in a sealed cubicle and maintain an armed guard if he likes—maybe that's part of his scenery; but the

banker must be accessible. "Nothing up our sleeves to deceive you" is the impression to be conveyed, and the idea is psychologically sound.

Mr. Stokes smiled at Mr. French, who instinctively smiled back. Mr. Stokes approached the gate in the railing, pushed through, accosted the bank president.

"Mr. French?"

The official nodded.

"There is something—"

"Yes," said Stokes. "I am thinking of starting an account with your bank. My name is Stokes, of Stokes & Blanchard, number 23A Wall Street, New York."

"Financial house?"

"Bonds. Stocks. High grade securities. We're opening an office here in Templeton."

"Any acquaintances here, Mr. Stokes—any references?"

"Well, I can't really say I have many acquaintances here who would vouch for me; but I can give you plenty of New York references."

"That 'll be all right," said French.

Stokes took an important-looking seal-leather pocketbook from inside his coat and laid a cashier's check for five thousand dollars on the desk. It was made payable to bearer and was drawn against a well-known New York bank.

"I'd like to deposit this," announced Stokes. "I suppose you allow interest on daily balance."

"Two per cent on amounts above five hundred; a trifle more on sustained balances running into thousands, by special arrangement. How much of a balance do you imagine you want to carry with us, Mr. Stokes?"

"Anywhere from two thousand to fifty, Mr. French. I rather think it will run pretty high as time goes on."

"H-m!" remarked Ed French; then, raising his voice: "Oh, Major!"

A young man arose at a near-by desk and approached.

"Mr. Stokes, this is Mr. Major, our assistant cashier. Mr. Stokes is opening an account with us, Major. Take care of him, will you? All right. Much obliged, Mr. Stokes. Glad to be of service."

Stokes trailed off with the assistant, got his passbook, checks, and deposit slips and presently left the bank. Along toward noon French called Major to his side.

"Get Stokes fixed up?"

"Yes."

"Did he give you his references?"

"Why, no, Mr. French. I thought he had satisfied you in that respect."

"Oversight. Thought you'd attend to it. Say, what do you think of him?"

"Don't know—pretty smooth citizen, I guess. What's his business?"

"Broker. He's opening an office here in town. I'll make some inquiries about his firm; this is a branch. But, Major, let me tip you off. Watch that account sharp. Don't permit a cent of overdraft, don't pay out a cent against uncollected funds, and let me know the moment his balance drops down to, say, five hundred."

Young Major raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips.

"Not quite sure of him?"

"Don't know but I am—too sure. Seems to me I've seen lots of chaps like him. You learn to recognize 'em in little old New York, my boy. They have to do business with the banks, and the banks know how to handle 'em. You hit it when you said smooth citizen. But don't say anything; just keep your eyes open."

Major departed and French smiled to himself. A good account was a good account. Ed didn't doubt for a moment that Stokes's deposits would at times run into big money; or that at others they would dwindle to sub-microscopic dimensions. That was all right; he was protecting his bank, taking no chances. He wondered who Stokes was, but really, it made very little difference.

Later that day, when the bank had closed, French on his way to the club glanced across the street at the Haynes Block and saw a sign painter at work lettering the name Stokes & Blanchard on a window above Gilbert's drug store. Those were good offices, in a first rate location. The Haynes Block was fairly new and rather commodious. The stairs leading to the second floor were broad and started to ascend just inside a rather pleasing entrance. Yes, Stokes had picked a good location.

Edward Chesterton French's incumbency of the job of president of the Sands County Trust & Savings antedated by a couple of months the selection of his little schoolmate, Beth Benson, as head of the competing institution. Ed was a Templeton boy, son of President Thomas French, of "the University." After finishing college he had gone to New York and devoted four years to the banking business—four hard and fruitful years. He was a brilliant young man; and he added to his ability a whole lot of aggressiveness, self-confidence and ginger. He was expected to make the Sands County Trust & Savings a bigger bank than old Joe Benson's, and had gone about the job with earnestness and enthusiasm.

But somehow, while the volume of his deposits had increased, he hadn't been able to gain on the Benson to any noticeable extent. Seemed strange, too. Ed couldn't convince himself that it was all due to Beth's management, although he knew she had put over some pretty clever stunts to get business. There was that series of talks she had given in outlying farm villages and to some of the women's organizations in Templeton on "Banking Convenience for Housekeepers." That was all right, if it didn't bring in too many small accounts. Ed liked big accounts. He figured that the average small account meant a loss to the bank. In New York, now, the banker would almost always insist on an average daily balance of five hundred, or three hundred at the very least.

Then there were the loans. The Sands County was carrying a lot of local paper, some of it at seven per cent. Templeton was a town of several large and many small industrial concerns. Templeton's merchants were up to date and well patronized. But, somehow, Ed felt sure the Benson had done a big business with the farmers this fall. He saw four, six, eight of their muddy automobiles parked at the curb near the Benson almost any time he wanted to look out his window. French was a good mixer, but he had as yet failed to find a way to the heart of this rural business. Of course he got some; but it didn't seem to increase much. He knew Beth Benson was passing out loads of money to the farmers at six per cent to help move their crops; and in this part of the country it was a comparatively new thing with the farms to do much borrowing.

Of course Ed knew only a part of the story—and that by hearsay—of Beth's long motor trips into the rural districts, of her carefully cultivated following among farmers' wives, of her shrewd exploitation of old Joe's name—a name known all over the State and synonymous with rigid honesty. Occasionally some one at the club mentioned Beth and her methods, which amused the sages of the town in no small degree. But the amusement was always tempered with respect because of the success that followed.

"Funny thing," remarked Amos Clark, one of Ed's directors. "That little snip—" Beth Benson was far from a little snip. "That little snip has some of the dog-gonedest ideas. She says a bank shouldn't be primarily a money making ins'tution; it's a public util'ty; kind of a guardeen of the people's fi-nancial welfare. Now ain't that an idea? Bank not a money making ins'tution! Huh!"

"Well, Amos, you haven't heard of the Benson losing any money, have you?"

"Well, now that you come to speak of it, I don't b'lieve I have."

"I guess you haven't. Did it occur to you that little Beth's protestations of solicitude concerning the public welfare have a certain advertising value?"

"Huh? Adv—well, now I dunno. Might be something in that, too. Don't know but you're right, Ed."

"Of course I'm right."

III.

THAT evening Mr. Edward Chesterton French presented himself, quite formally, at the Benson residence. Yes, Mr. Joe and Miss Beth were both at home; and Mr. Elmer Curtiss had been dining with them. Wouldn't he step right into the living room.

"Why, Ed French!" cried Beth. "How perfectly dandy to have you drop in. Now we can play a little bridge—you play bridge, don't you, Ed? Joe plays very well,

and Elmer—Elmer's picking it up, aren't you, Elmer?"

Ed grinned a "delighted, I'm sure" and wished instantly that he hadn't hit on a night when Curtiss was calling. However, the bridge game languished for some reason, Joe Benson muttered something about having to be at the office early, and retired, and Elmer Curtiss said he guessed he'd be running along.

"Well," said Ed French, finding himself face to face with Beth across the fireplace, and grinning affably, "I thought I'd struck quite a crowd; this is nicer."

"Why, Edward, don't you like my lil brother and good old Elmer? I just love 'em both."

"Sure, I like them; but I didn't come to see them. I came to see you. I hardly ever run across you evenings; you don't seem to be going out much."

"No," said Beth, "I'm so busy daytimes I don't feel much like evening gayeties; and besides, I do a lot of studying and reading at home. I haven't had your practical experience, you know. It's quite an undertaking to keep up with my job."

"And how goes the job?"

"I have my troubles, Edward. Things aren't always sunshine and roses; and—well, we have competition to consider."

French smiled.

"You don't mind a little thing like that, do you? Besides, I imagine a comparison of your books and the Sands County's wouldn't show we'd gained a whole lot—yet."

"The competition doesn't always show on the books, Eddy. It's—well, subtler than that."

"You flatter us. I hadn't supposed—however, maybe you'd rather not talk shop. I really did intend this for a social call. You know, before coming back from New York I had rather looked forward to renewing the old—what shall I call it—friendship? I can't tell you how disappointed I am to see so little of you. And then to find ourselves on opposite sides of the fence in a business way—that complicates the situation; unless—unless—well, you remember what I said to you that night out at the country club when I first got back?"

"You know you weren't speaking seriously, Ed; and what you said was absurd. Making love to me so as to combine our families and consolidate the banks! Did any one ever hear of anything so—so—mercenary?"

"Wonder you hadn't said 'sordid,'" said Ed, a trifle hurt. He was always getting his emotions and his flare for commerce jumbled; it was the way he was made. He was an exceedingly personable young man, who wore New York clothes in a New Yorky way and lent what might be termed a "flash of form" to the sartorial monotony of Templeton's ready-made younger male population.

"Let's change the subject," said Beth. She was a bit embarrassed. The conversation wasn't going to suit her in the least. Years ago she had thought herself pretty fond of Ed French, that is, back in pre-college days. Yet now she knew he wasn't an essentially different Ed French from the rather aggressive, selfish boy of high school years.

"Let's talk shop," she suggested. "Banking means as much to you as it does to me; it's your life. I can't think of anything more interesting; and you know you and I don't agree on policies, which makes it all the more so."

"All right," said Ed resignedly. "Fire away."

"I was speaking of competition. What are we—you and I, as bankers—going to do about this brokerage concern that's setting up shop in the Haynes Block?"

Ed French fidgeted in his chair.

"Why, I—I don't know; do we need to do anything?"

"Do you mean to say you haven't enough public spirit to see the necessity of doing something? What is a bank for, if I may ask?"

"To deal in money—at a profit."

"Oh, really? Hasn't it any responsibility beyond money making?"

Ed sat up in his chair and leaned forward.

"I'd heard something like that as having originated with you, Beth," he said. "Pretty clever, I call it."

The girl reddened.

"I don't see anything clever about it.

It's right in line with modern thought—that no business run wholly for profit is a good business."

"Well, for the love of— What is a bank or any other business for, in your opinion?"

"Usefulness, service; in the case of a bank, guardianship."

"At so much per guard, eh?"

The man's cynicism enraged Beth, but she controlled herself.

"Take this case of Stokes," she went on. "He'll be around and offer you his account—if he hasn't already done so."

She stopped suddenly and looked searchingly into French's face; instantly she knew the truth.

"Oh, Ed! How *could* you?"

"How could I?" repeated French, bridling. "Why wouldn't I? Say, you don't mean to tell me you—"

"Turned him down? I certainly did."

"But why? There are plenty of ways to safeguard an account you are not absolutely sure of."

"Oh, yes, that's easy—safeguard the bank and at the same time furnish the depositor with conveniences for preying on the public."

"But you don't know that Stokes is going to prey on the public. The brokerage business is a legitimate business—"

"It is; but all so-called brokers aren't to be trusted. I'm suspicious of this man Stokes, anyhow. Perhaps he is all right, although even if he is, I fail to see why we should encourage outsiders to come here and sell securities when we might build up bond departments of our own."

"I don't consider dealing in securities proper business for a bank."

"No? I should say that selling high-grade bonds was absolutely a banker's duty."

"An uphill game and darned small profit."

"Profit, profit! Don't you ever think of anything but profit? Don't you ever think of what you can do for your public?"

French shook his head. All he could make out of Beth's fine phrases about the banker's obligations to the community was a rather clever advertising device to get the Benson Bank talked about. Goodness knew that institution had had enough publicity in the last few months!

"Casting your bread upon the waters, eh?" he half jeered. "Well, I hope it comes back to you in the form of large shiploads of business. Guess it's about time I was running along."

Beth did not urge him to stay; she was rather upset. Afterward she wondered if it wasn't just what she might have expected of Ed French.

The president of the Sands County Trust and Savings Company was far from complacent as he left the Benson home. He certainly hadn't intended to get into a dispute when he had decided to call on the young lady, in fact, he had gone to see her with quite a different purpose in view. He made his way to his lodgings rather grumpily, a rare frame of mind for one usually cheerful in the exuberance of his own self-confidence.

IV.

It was not long before it became apparent that the Templeton office of Stokes & Blanchard was doing a brisk business. Mr. Stokes was a good mixer, and rapidly enlarged his acquaintance with the townspeople. He picked out a church and became a regular attendant, contributing liberally when the plate was passed. He was a member of at least one fraternal organization maintaining a lodge in Templeton and never missed a meeting.

Within a month he was calling a score of the younger citizens by their first names, and in his office you would always find a group of neighborly visitors who had formed the habit of dropping in to learn "the state of the market." It seemed almost incredible that Templeton had got along all these years without a Stokes & Blanchard. There was, it was true, an afternoon paper that carried a brief summary of Wall Street news with a short list of bond and stock quotations. But the information seemed more interesting, even fascinating, when you got it from Stokes's frequently chalked-up bulletins.

He hadn't as yet installed his private wire to New York, or a ticker, but the feet of

telegraph boys made a never-ceasing clatter on the broad stairway leading to the second floor of the Haynes Block. Stokes sat behind his big desk and talked entertainingly on finance. He was always worth listening to, a mine of information on the subject of Wall Street and its activities. He knew all about the "Big Board," the "Curb" and the other exchanges; he could render an intelligent opinion on any listed stock without hesitation.

He kept on hand a supply of literature—bond lists, prospectuses of new issues, bulletins of leading banks and financial houses and the very latest "dope sheets" printed on green and pink flimsy, which he hung up by means of a clip where they were accessible to all his callers. He had an office boy and a stenographer, and a little cubbyhole of a private office, but most of the time he sat outside in the large main room.

Gradually he developed a line of business, very conservative and cautious. He seldom used the word speculation, but was always talking about income, investments, dividends, interest and maturities. For a long time he refrained from selling anything on margin. If asked about margin trading he held up a stern hand and rolled his eyes heavenward. No, indeed, not in that office. Stocks bought outright were one thing, gambling on margin quite another.

Stokes now and then sold a block of bonds to some well-to-do Templetonian. He was scrupulously exact and technical in all his dealings. He was ethical to the last degree.

And then a day came when he got together six of his acquaintances and slipped them a hot tip. He did it with an appearance of the utmost secrecy; it was something he didn't believe in, but he confessed that occasionally when an unusual opportunity — a lead pipe — came along, he allowed himself to profit by it. Now here was such an opportunity and he proposed to share it with his friends. It didn't require a large outlay—just a couple of hundred each, on a ten-point margin—think of it, two hundred dollars would margin twenty shares, or about that, at current quotations, and for every point the stock jumped, you made twenty dollars. When she went up ten points you doubled your money. Of course, it couldn't be done every time, but in this case—well, he was absolutely sure of his source of information and even now awaiting a code telegram saying the time was at hand.

All six promptly produced the two hundred dollars. In ten days Stokes announced that the stock was up eight points and advised selling. The six agreed, satisfied with a profit of eighty dollars, or forty per cent.

Stokes got out his check book and began to fill in the first check. Then he said:

"Wait a minute, boys. Why not leave this two hundred and eighty dollars on my books as an open account? You can have it any time you want it, but you never can tell when some good thing may drop, and if you have this nest egg already credited to you it will be very convenient. Perhaps you might not otherwise have two or three hundred ready cash for instant use."

Five of the six agreed; the sixth said he guessed he'd draw his out and use it; his bank account was a bit low, anyhow.

Later, on a similar transaction, the balance on Stokes's books was reduced to one hundred and sixty dollars. The members of the pool grumbled a little, but stuck along. A third transaction increased their credits fifty dollars. Of course in time losses wiped out these accounts. But gradually others got in, until Stokes's office was almost inadequate to take care of the business. He seemed to have forgotten his early prejudice against margin trading, opened accounts with all comers who could produce a few dollars to gamble with, charged interest for carrying margined stocks and called for more margins when prices dropped. He seldom got a "hot tip," but installed a ticker and let his clients use their own judgment as to what stocks they would play. He erected a big blackboard across one end of the room, where a boy tramped up and down posting quotations and raucously bawling the prices as he did so.

In other words, Stokes was running a full-grown, up-to-date brokerage office with all its appurtenances and abuses. Of course he was bucketing practically all orders, but with twelve hours of railroad between his own and his "home office" he always had

that much leeway if called upon to make deliveries of actual shares purchased. He paid profits promptly if the client insisted, and with equal promptness went through the motions of closing out customers who couldn't come across with additional margins on demand.

Yes, Templeton was an up-to-date city, with a nice bucketshop all its own—something to be proud of, something to help make prudent, useful citizens of its growing-up young men. Not that the youngsters were Stokes's only clientele; he caught men of all ages—for at what age does a man become immune to the insidious infection of the gambling bacillus? Now and then some fairly prosperous citizen went broke through " investments " made in the little, smoke-filled, crowded office over Gilbert's drug store. Many of the younger men, clerks and small-paid employees who could find an hour or two a day to duck their legitimate pursuits and watch the board, kept themselves penniless or worse; and several got into serious trouble through using money not their own.

The time came when Stokes was emboldened to give up his second floor quarters and hire a space in the lobby of the Templeton House, which was of advantage in many ways, first because it was handy, and second because one may enter a perfectly respectable hotel on any one of a number of innocent pretexts.

At the Sands County Trust and Savings Company Stokes's deposit account waxed fat; in fact, it was one of the most valued accounts in the bank. Stokes the broker was a citizen of parts, and because he seemed to be living scrupulously up to every obligation, no fault was found with him, except by a few croakers who didn't realize that they were half a century behind the times and admit that a hustling brokerage house was a sign of enterprise and gave the city a class not enjoyed by many others equally populous.

V.

Just as if this poor old, abused, prodigal, foolish, overtaxed country of ours didn't have troubles enough, an oil boom hit us and hit us hard. It hit us at a time when poor men found themselves in possession of real money—money in delirious, intoxicating quantities; at a time when it was distinctly out of style not to be rich or, if you weren't rich, not to make a noise like a millionaire. Those of us who had tasted a little sample of this easy money were hungry for more; those of us who had been plodding along for years and who somehow failed to be caught up on a fortuitous wave of green currency eyed our luckier neighbors enviously. The oil craze couldn't have struck us at a more egregiously psychological moment.

The newspapers were full of oil. Every day brought more tales of gushers and fresh-laid Aladdins bossing newly decanted jinni of fabulous powers. Every day brought stirring accounts of " killings " and " clean-up " in Wall Street. The air was full of reports of stocks bought on a cents-per-share basis which had gone kiting into the dollars class. Everywhere the big, thoughtless, gullible public was tumbling over itself to buy anything printed in blue ink, with curlicues and pictures of derricks. There was something significant in the coincident shortage of paper and an avalanche of stock certificates.

Mr. Stokes, of the Templeton office of Stokes & Blanchard, made a couple of trips to New York. Mr. Stokes had established himself in Templeton and was making money; but he decided he wasn't making enough money, or making it fast enough. It had taken him months to build up his business; but, after all, it was a slow-going, conservative business, in his estimation. If he didn't look out, lots of chaps no smarter than himself, no better acquainted with the technique of the stock-selling game, no more adroit in the handling of alluring promotions, would pull out of this big oil stock market with a million or more, leaving him piffling along in a small town with a one-horse bucketshop—a precarious enterprise at best, and one likely to come to an abrupt end when the present countrywide gambling frenzy should just bog down and trickle out at the waste pipe like the water in a bathtub.

Did Mr. Stokes want to be left high and dry with a few paltry thousands—if he man-

aged to save so much—when the easy-money tide receded? He did not.

Hence the trips to New York, and hence the announcement, presently, that Mr. Stokes had been allotted a "limited block" of shares in the Alhambra Leasing and Drilling Company, which he could now offer residents of Templeton and vicinity at the attractive price of forty cents a share, prior to an advance in price shortly to be announced. Mr. Stokes made it plain that he meant exactly what he said by "limited allotment"—that he really had only about enough shares to satisfy the demands of his regular customers and acquaintances.

Sure enough, his regular customers and acquaintances did absorb this initial block, whereupon Mr. Stokes permitted it to be known that he had been able to secure a second allotment, but at an advanced price, fifty cents a share. He explained clearly enough, too, that this ten-cent advance in price was equivalent to just so much profit for the fortunate investors whose sagacity and foresight had led them to buy the stock at the forty-cent price.

About now Mr. Stokes employed an imported salesman of pleasing address to work among the citizens of Templeton and see also what could be done in the outlying farming districts. Ed French, of the Sands County Trust and Savings, scanning the reports of his bookkeeper, was gratified to see the rapidity with which Stokes's account grew. But he took pains to warn his paying teller and bookkeeper to keep a very sharp lookout on every transaction of Stokes with the bank.

"That bird is cleaning up," he thought. "You never can tell when he may take a notion to jump!"

VI.

Beth Benson pressed a button, summoning Michael Flannery.

"Ask Mr. Sayles to see me, will you, Michael?"

"Yes, Miss Beth."

Presently Mr. Sayles appeared before her desk in the big directors' room.

"Hello, Win," said Beth. "How are Alice and the kiddies?"

"Fine, Beth. Nice day, isn't it?"

Sayles was a good looking young man, about her own age. He looked rather easy-going, not overmature. He was blond and wholesome. If you had scrutinized his face, perhaps you would have noticed a hint of anxiety in the blue eyes as he entered the room in answer to Beth's summons.

"How long have you been with the bank?" she asked.

"Nearly four years."

"Like it?"

"Why, of course I like it."

Win Sayles looked a trifle puzzled.

"Father started you in at ten dollars a week, didn't he? And now you're getting forty-five."

"That's right."

Beth drummed gently on the edge of her desk with her finger tips—a habit inherited from old Joe Benson. She looked off through a window and was very thoughtful. Then she turned back to the young man.

"Sit down, Win," she said.

Sayles sank into a chair. The glint of anxiety in his eyes was now the light of absolute panic.

"Can't you live on forty-five dollars a week, Win?"

"Why — er — yes — of course—well, it isn't real easy, with a family the size of mine—but we manage to scrape along—"

"Been speculating?"

Win didn't reply. He was in a hole—a deep one. He squirmed in his chair.

"We've been a little curious about you lately, Win. I can't imagine any reason but one why you should have been putting in so much of your spare time—and some you couldn't spare—over at the Templeton House. We know pretty much who the regular frequenters of Stokes's bucketshop are, and I'm sorry to say you're among them. I'm awfully sorry, Win. I've known you all my life—we went to high school together, and your sister Letty was—is—an intimate friend of mine. Oh, Win, why didn't you think of your mother, and your nice wife and kids—I'm just heartbroken."

"But, Beth, wha—what— Suppose I did drop a little change over at Stokes's—"

Beth flushed, her grief suddenly transformed into indignation.

"Win Sayles, you know what I'm talking

about. You are short five thousand dollars' worth of bonds—the collateral on Judson Vaughn's note. I've had you checked up, and I know. That's all we've found so far; but it's bad enough. What I'm puzzling my head over now is how to keep you out of the penitentiary!"

She spoke with an almost masculine, almost brutal directness that brought a cry of frightened protest from the note teller.

"My God, Beth! Don't—don't say that!"

"See here, Win Sayles, how much have you taken so far? Come, this is no time for dodging, because you can't dodge. If this thing goes to the board of directors—"

"Beth, the Vaughn collateral is all; I swear it is. Five thousand in bonds—and I'll get 'em back—some way—yes, I promise—"

"Get 'em back? How? Have you got the money? Where are they, anyhow? Over at Stokes's? A fine mess you've got into—and to have it happen when my father's away, and I'm responsible—"

She stopped—thought a moment—opened a drawer and pulled out a check book, in which she scribbled hurriedly.

"How much did you put them up for?" she asked.

"Thirty-nine hundred—and let's see, there'll be interest—"

Win figured a minute on a bit of scrap.

"Forty-seven twenty-eight," he said.

Beth finished the check.

"Here's my personal check for four thousand dollars," she said. "Go out to the window and get the money; then get the bonds and bring them back and put them where they belong. After that I'll see what is to be done. I honestly can't tell you, Win, what I shall do; but you realize you are in a very delicate position. Will you please notify Mr. Garvin that your place as note teller is vacant, so that he can see that your work is taken care of. You can't expect me to trust you with the bank's or our customers' property for another minute. Hurry now; I hope there won't be any slip."

Win Sayles departed, leaving Beth in a brown study. Her usually smooth forehead showed the shadow of a frown. She suddenly felt old. She had undertaken her work in the bank with an enthusiasm that amounted to jubilation, with a head full of fine theories about banking—theories sound enough, to be sure, or her father would never have given them his approval. There was a zest in the working out of her plans, in seeing her efforts fruitful of new business and increased prestige for the bank.

But she hadn't foreseen some of the rough spots. This revelation concerning Win Sayles—a nice boy, from a good family in town—brought home to Beth the conviction that a banker's life isn't all plain sailing.

She remembered her interview with the broker, Stokes, the hunch she had obeyed in declining to accept his account. She had felt quite righteous about it. She had kept her skirts clean, and those of the bank. As Stokes had flourished and his activities had grown, she had been increasingly glad she wasn't furnishing any of the facilities to help him conduct his business. Now she wondered if her responsibility and that of the bank hadn't extended further. She might have done something to keep Stokes out of Templeton; but she hadn't, and now the bucketshop had stretched forth a tentacle into her own house and enmeshed one of her own people. It was a bad mess, putting the bank in a weak position, she thought. With Stokes so firmly established, the job of ousting him might prove far more difficult than it would have been to keep him out at the beginning; and Beth would always have the feeling that it wasn't on the public's account that she undertook a campaign against the broker, but because she was now forced by selfish consideration to do so.

Well, she was going to do something just the same.

Win Sayles returned and laid a package on Beth's desk. She checked the bonds over rapidly.

"Go and put these in the vault and then come back here, please."

When Win reappeared, Beth said:

"I suppose you thought you were going to get rich on some one else's capital."

"I thought the investment was—was all right. I still think so."

"What was it?"

"Alhambra Leasing and Drilling. Stokes

let me in at a special price for a good-sized block; it's going on the curb in a month, and the price 'll be three or four times what I paid."

"Stokes says so."

"Stokes is all right, Beth. He treats every one square. No one can say he has ever laid down on an obligation since he's been in Templeton."

"Most any one can keep up an appearance of honesty for a few months, Win; and that's his policy. Have you your stock certificate?"

"They'll be delivered in a couple of days; the subscriptions have to be forwarded to New York and the stock transferred—"

"Did Stokes tell you that?"

"Sure."

"Wasn't the stock already standing in your name, after you'd put up all those bonds?"

"Why—why, I hadn't thought of that. I just put up the bonds with Stokes to hold the oil stock at the price he let me have it for. And, by the way, he said it was lucky he hadn't sent the bonds to New York for safe-keeping. He had 'em in his safety deposit box over at the Sands."

"H-m," mused Beth. "I see; at least, I'm beginning to see. Now, Win Sayles, what are you going to do for a living?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I'll start job hunting right away—provided you don't proceed against me on account of the bonds."

"Win, I don't want to proceed against you; but I can't see that this incident has proved a very sharp lesson to you—so far. It's pretty easy for you, my coming forward with four thousand dollars because I'm forced to do it to protect the bank; believe me, if it had been just to save you, I wouldn't have done it. I doubt if you're worth it. However, we'll see. I wish you'd get on the phone and have Alice come right over."

"Oh, Beth, you don't mean—"

"To make you tell your wife? I certainly do."

"Do you want to break her heart?"

"No, I don't want to; but there's only one way to save you, and Alice will have to help. It 'll be one of her penalties for having married any one as weak as you. She thought you were all right because you had a job in the bank. You traded on the bank's reputation, in a way, when you were courting Alice. Well, I want Alice to understand the situation plainly. The bank isn't responsible for you. You are lucky to have a wife like Alice, Win. She'll back you and help you when lots of girls would turn you out. You send for her right now."

"I'm not going to do it."

"Very well; the whole matter goes before the board to-morrow morning. Good day, Mr. Sayles."

"But, Beth—"

"Good *day*, Mr. Sayles."

Half an hour later Mrs. Win Sayles was closeted with her husband and the president of the Benson Bank of Templeton. It is not necessary to go into the details of that conference. When it broke up, Mrs. Sayles's eyes were observed to be moistly red, and so were her husband's. Beth looked tired. The Sayleses left the bank building together, Mrs. Sayles remarking:

"Isn't she a darling? Isn't she a wonder?"

The president came out of the directors' room and took her place at her small desk in the front office. On her way thither she bent over Garvin's shoulder and said very softly:

"It's all right, for the present. Lucky you and I are the only ones who know. The bonds are back in the vault. I've hired Win Sayles on commission, with a drawing account of thirty dollars a week, to go out and sell securities for a new department I'm starting. It gives him a chance, and besides that there's something I want him to do incidentally that may lead to developments."

"But what—what securities are you going to have him offer?"

"Bonds—oil bonds. I know where I can buy a hundred thousand seven per cent first mortgage World Oil & Refining on a five-point spread, and I've wired I'd take them. They're good as gold."

"Oh, of course; absolutely. But you've got your nerve."

"I don't know. I don't believe it's nerve

when you go ahead and do a thing you seem forced to do. I'm working in self-protection now."

"Well, Miss Beth, you know best. I'm with you, whatever you decide to do. It 'll be interesting to see how the thing works out; and any time you want to tell me a little more, so it won't be quite such a Chinese puzzle, I'll be glad to listen."

"All right," said Beth cheerfully. "First chance I get I'll give you all the details."

She moved along to her desk, where a customer waited to speak with her. Garvin looked after her, his lips moving. I'm not sure, but I think they formed the words: "She's a wonder, by George, a wonder!"

VII.

THE astute though respectable Mr. Stokes, manager of the Templeton branch of Stokes & Blanchard, sat in his comfortable room at the Templeton House and pondered, something in this fashion:

"I don't know but I've about milked this section dry. I suppose I ought not to complain, but it seems to me I could strike some place where the going would be a little easier. I don't want to go back to New York, because while it is full of suckers, it is also infested with wise guys; and besides, I might get stung myself. I've always got along better when I kept away from Wall Street and that gang of trimmers. I may be pretty smooth when I'm among the hicks, but with that mob of sharks I don't seem to stand a Chinaman's chance. Lord! Wouldn't I like to go down into Broad Street and put Alhambra on the curb as an unlisted oil and give the market a bump! It's the only way to make a big killing; go heeled with a good-sized bank roll and catch a bunch of those fellows short. But I don't know; if I stubbed my toe it would mean good night bank roll, and I've certainly worked too hard the last few months for what little I've got to risk it. Still—"

Stokes kept on pondering until bedtime. He was a gambler at heart, as are all his kind. Of course, a sure-thing venture was what he was always looking for; but wanting a sure thing, and once fevered with the awakened virus, he would gamble on anything. That was why he was afraid.

Along toward midnight he went to bed. As he turned off the light he mumbled something like:

"I wish I knew. I wish I was either too scared to think of it, or else had nerve enough to make up my mind to give it a whirl without so darned much debate. By George, nerve is what I need. I don't know, I don't know."

Alhambra Leasing & Drilling had, according to Stokes's notion, gone only half as well as it ought to go in Templeton. The townspeople had bought a good deal of the stock, but the rural sections hadn't panned out so well. Stokes and his salesman had worked hard, but the farming population had been slow to fall for his proposition. His Templeton office had practically abandoned all business except the exploitation of Alhambra. The bucketshop end of the game languished. Stokes made every effort to induce successful speculators to take their profits in Alhambra stock. He had by successive advances pushed the price up to ninety cents a share, and at this quotation the stock was very, very sluggish.

Earlier buyers were beginning to want to know when they could cash in and take their profits. It took a good deal of Stokes's time to explain to inquirers that he wasn't in the business of buying Alhambra, but of selling it in order to get capital for development purposes. How, he asked, could he buy back stock when the company was using the proceeds of sales for drilling and other expenses? He insisted that these people hadn't bought the stock just to sell again; they had bought it as an investment, something that they might reasonably expect would pay them huge dividends in the near future; and, anyhow, if they were so shortsighted as to prefer immediate profit, they would have early opportunity to realize that profit when the stock "went on the New York curb," which he assured them was likely to happen any day now.

Stokes had not had the least intention of putting Alhambra on the curb. But with a very comfortable balance in the Sands County Trust & Savings, it occurred to

him that, after all, it might be the best thing he could do. He knew the psychology of the speculating public. They always wanted to sell on the declines, to buy on the rises. For every sucker who would dump his stock for the sake of a few cents a share profit, a rising series of curb quotations would coax ten hungry investors to buy.

The danger lay, he knew, in the foxy-eyed crowd of short traders, always on the lookout for some one who would prove fool enough to try to support a stock, whom they could raid and smash for their own profit. It had happened a thousand times. It had happened to Stokes himself at least once. That was one reason he'd like to try it again—on the chance that he might catch the crowd " for fair " and squeeze a juicy revenge out of their shrieking bank accounts.

It would be all or nothing; either a complete triumph—in which case every person who had bought a share of Alhambra in Templeton would have a chance to get out with a profit, if he had sense enough—or absolute failure, in which case he would quit penniless and every stockholder would lose one hundred per cent of his investment. And it will be noticed that, in such a campaign, the real value of the Alhambra's alleged holdings in the oil fields would have practically nothing to do with the outcome one way or another. But that didn't worry Stokes.

He arose next morning after a conscience-clear night's rest and discovered that, so refreshed, one need not hesitate to make decisions. He made his.

" I'll go broke or I'll clean up," he thought. " What's the use of trying to satisfy myself with this hand-to-mouth game?"

Whereupon it becomes evident that the profits can't come too fast for men of Mr. Stokes's type, since his deposits at the Sands County already ran well into six figures.

Later in the day the broker conferred seriously with Mr. Charlie Grabb, his salesman.

" The rubes don't fall very hard, do they?"

" Stokesie, they don't fall at all. They're a cagey lot. I haven't earned enough commissions in the last month to pay for my cigars."

" How do you account for it?"

" Well, aren't you an old enough bird to know that farmers don't make good speculators? They'll go to the county fair and guess about the little joker under the shell, but they don't warm up to a real live money-making investment opportunity. You have to explain the whole idea of investment from the ground up, and when you get through they ask you some fool question that shows they don't know what you have been talking about. Honest, Stokesie, I can't afford the time, and I don't see how you can afford to pay me a salary for working such territory. Now if it was Seaport, or some other live city, I wouldn't have a doubt in the world—"

" Guess you're right, Charlie. Anyhow, I'm about through here. The oil thing has put the skids under the brokerage game, and I've sold about all the Alhambra this burg will absorb. Time to move along, Charlie—time to move along."

" Where to?"

" We-ell, I don't know's I can tell you just what I'll do. The boom is still on; the market's lively, and I don't feel satisfied with the business I've done so far on a proposition as good as Alhambra."

" Satisfied? Some folks wouldn't be satisfied if they had pie *all* the time."

" Charlie, there's faster ways of makin' it than this, believe me."

" And riskier. I suppose you mean the curb."

Stokes nodded.

" I've been thinking of it."

" Poor fish!" remarked Mr. Grabb. " Well, some folks never learn anything; and the guy that gets his living off the suckers is sure the biggest sucker of the bunch."

" Yep; I guess you're right. But—I'm going to play 'em close to my chest this trip, Charlie."

Charlie chortled.

" Haw! That's what they all say. By the way, know you've got some competition out among the rubes?"

" 'S that so? Who's working besides you?"

"This here Benson Bank's going after the money on a bond scheme—real pig's eye, too—World's Oil & Refining seven per cent first mortgage—"

"Don't make me laugh; there's no profit in bonds."

"That's all right. The bank's got a guy out, and he's doing quite some little business; and what do you think? He's taking Alhambra in exchange for bonds; can you beat that?"

Stokes threw back his head and roared. It was the funniest thing he'd ever heard in his life. It was simply too ridiculous to be true. Why—

"Charlie, I always supposed you were as truthful as a con man could be; but, say, this time you've sure slopped over. Tell us something that's at least plausible."

"You can believe it or not," said Charlie, a trifle injured. "I don't give a damn; it's a fact."

"Well, who the hell ever thought of that bright idea? The bonds can't be much good."

"Good as wheat, Stokesie. There isn't anything better. It's that little jane that runs the bank—"

"Oh, her! Well, maybe that explains it. A dame will do 'most anything. Say, why didn't I go and sell her a big block of Alhambra, if she thinks it's that good? Still—"

Stokes remembered his one brief interview with Miss Benson.

"What the devil is she up to, do you suppose?"

"I don't know; but don't fool yourself. She's wise to Alhambra, all right. Of course she's only getting it in small blocks, because I never got any big chunks of it planted. And what do you think? She's knocking all oil stocks right and left. She's giving those hicks the straight tip about oil promotions, and wherever I run across her bond salesman's trail I had some darned embarrassin' questions handed me."

Stokes looked thoughtful. He was always suspicious of anything he could not understand. Suddenly he said:

"Charlie, I guess it's about time I blew this town. I've got a hunch all is not well along the Potomac to-night—not at all well. Dog-gone it, I never did like that little skirt, and I knew she didn't like me the minute she took a look at my pleasing map. Say, Charles, take it from me—she's deep and she's smart, and she's a smooth worker. And I'm going away from here before it is too late."

VIII.

If Stokes had come to his decision to quit Templeton a day or two sooner, he might not have found it too late. He had nearly two hundred thousand dollars in bonds and on deposit with the Sands County Trust & Savings. It was going to look mighty suspicious if he drew it all out at once. Well, that was all right. He knew a way. He drew a check payable to the Alhambra Leasing & Drilling Company for all but a few dollars. That would look fairly plausible, since he was supposed to have been selling stock for the benefit of the Alhambra treasury. Then, with a rubber stamp and a flourish of the pen, he indorsed the check over his own name as treasurer of the oil company and started with every appearance of leisureliness for the bank.

A young man—Win Sayles, as it happened—touched him on the arm.

"Hello, Mr. Sayles," said Stokes cordially. "How's things?"

"Mr. Stokes, Miss Benson asked me if I'd run over here and see if you'd mind dropping into the bank for a few minutes."

"Well, now, you tell Miss Benson I'd love to; but just now I've got an errand to do that won't wait. How'd a half hour from now do?"

"I'm afraid it wouldn't do, Mr. Stokes. She seemed to think it was important enough to ask you to come right away."

"Well, I can't—not now."

"You better," said Win Sayles. "You better, if you have any regard for your health; at least, that's my advice."

"I'll do no such thing. Think I'm at the beck and call of every dame that happens to have a job in a bank? Who the hell is your Miss Benson, I'd like to know?"

"You better," repeated Win softly.

"I'm telling you, you better. Maybe you will thank me afterward for tipping you off. Come, it's only a step."

Something in the young man's manner impressed Stokes. He saw he'd better go, in spite of his deep-seated reluctance. He turned and followed Win.

There was nothing reassuring in the manner of Miss Benson as she greeted the broker, although she courteously invited him to be seated.

"Mr. Sayles said you'd like to see me," remarked Stokes, with an attempt at lightness. "I told him I was pretty busy—but—anything to oblige a lady, of course."

He smiled with feeble affability.

"Or the police," remarked the bank president.

Stokes looked reproachfully at the young woman.

"Oh, now, Miss Benson, that's pretty rough. You go too far when you say that; no one's got anything on me. I came over here to be nice, not because I had to. I don't see any reason why you should insult me."

"I suppose not. It depends on what you call an insult. However, we'll drop that. The thing we want to get at right away is, what are you going to do about it?"

"About what?"

"The Alhambra oil stock you've been selling. I have a suggestion to make, Mr. Stokes, that may solve the problem nicely."

"Yes?" Stokes was extremely uneasy. What was this extraordinary young woman going to put over next?

"You can buy back the stock."

"Well, I should say not! What do you take me for? The stock's all right—a good speculative investment. When it goes out on the curb—"

"It may go on the curb; that's your business. But you're going to buy back what you've sold in and about Templeton."

"But I haven't cash enough."

"What have you done with the proceeds of all the stock you have sold?"

"Why, Miss Benson, you know I have been selling treasury stock for development purposes."

"Under a contract with the Alhambra Drilling & Leasing Co., I presume!"

"Of course."

"With an agreement to purchase the stock on a sliding scale of prices, beginning at about five cents per share."

Stokes looked startled.

"The terms," he said, "are hardly that favorable."

"Perhaps not quite. That can all be brought out later if necessary. But the fact remains that you organized the Alhambra Company, dictate its policies, and could readily make such a contract with Mr. Stokes, the broker."

Mr. Stokes, the broker, smiled a smile which he did not intend to express a certain sly triumph.

"Do you know any law against such a contract, if carefully executed and lived up to, Miss Benson?"

"No," said Beth, "not in this State."

"Then," queried the broker sharply, "what's the big idea? You haven't got anything on me."

"No," Beth acquiesced, "I suppose not, with the exception of a few little things you have perhaps not thought of and which I will just call your attention to, by way of refreshing your memory. Is the draft from that window annoying you?"

Stokes hastily assured her he was quite comfortable.

"In the first place," went on the bank president, "we're not quite sure whether your real name is Stokes or Sloan. Information we have obtained, however, seems to indicate that it may be either. We are positive it was you against whom an indictment was found four years ago by an Ohio grand jury for a fraudulent stock transaction in that State. At that time you were known as W. K. Sloan. For some reason or another, the matter has never been brought to trial; so the indictment still hangs over you.

"Now, Mr. Stokes, you came here to Templeton representing yourself to be a legitimate stock broker; and Templeton people were incautious enough to accept you at your own valuation. You have had several months in which to operate, and you've built up a thriving business. I will not go into details beyond saying that the firm of Stokes & Blanchard, of which you

claim to be a member, and of which your Templeton office is supposed to be a branch, has done all its business right here in town; and that your New York office consists of desk room in the office of another broker whose business, in so far as we have been able to learn, is hardly less questionable than your own. There you have employed a young woman whose sole duty seems to be to send you here in Templeton frequent telegrams concerning current prices of active stocks."

"All of which," cut in Stokes, "is perfectly innocent in the eyes of the law."

"True," agreed Beth, "but there is hardly room for doubt that of the many thousands of dollars' worth of orders for stocks executed by you here in Templeton, at least ninety-five per cent have been bucketed."

"You'd have hard work to prove that, Miss Benson. I have always delivered the stock purchased by my customers when called for."

"A negligible proportion, since your business has been almost exclusively on margins; and you have been adroit enough to see that in most cases the client had nothing coming to him; and lately those who did have a credit balance on your books have been induced to accept Alhambra stock in settlement. An examination of your affairs under a civil suit would doubtless turn up some valuable data."

"You seem to have some pretty accurate inside knowledge concerning my business," sneered Stokes.

"Merely because your business has been so typical of most enterprises of its kind that it was easy to discover the combination. Now, Mr. Stokes, I'm not threatening you. I'm only telling you a little of what I know about you and your methods. You came into this town with the deliberate intent of making a cleanup. I don't know about other banks, but this is a bank with a conscience and with a sense of responsibility, not only toward its customers, but toward the community it serves. I declined your business the day you came to town. I have been lax in not taking steps which would have prevented loss to a good many Templeton people—loss which it is now too late to remedy. But I don't propose to let you walk out of this town with two or three hundred thousand dollars of easy money. You may have oil properties, or you may not. Of course, judging your promotion by others conducted along similar lines, the value of your Alhambra holdings is probably extremely small."

"We have ten thousand acres of the best prospective oil leases in Tex—"

"That may be. In other words, ten thousand acres of wildcat, undrilled, and for all we know hundreds of miles away from any proven territory."

"Now, that isn't so, Miss Benson. All our leases are in good proven producing sections, and when we have put down a well or two—"

"All right, Mr. Stokes—I'll take your word for it. I hope what you say is true; but you'll have to raise capital for development purposes elsewhere. I want you to turn over to me the contents of your safety deposit box at the Sands County Trust and the amount of your cash on deposit there. I will make arrangements with Mr. French of the other bank, and we will act as joint custodians of the securities and money until such time as all those in this vicinity who wish to sell back their Alhambra stock have had ample opportunity to do so. We will charge you only a nominal fee for advertising and incidental expenses; and at the end of three months, if anything is left, you may have a check for it and welcome. In the meanwhile, we shall be glad if you make your headquarters in some other part of the country."

"Well," cried Stokes, "that's the coolest proposition I ever had put up to me. It won't leave me a shoestring. I've paid for the leases with proceeds of the stock sales."

"Yes, but you had some money of your own, namely the profits of your bucketshop when you started what you thought would be a bigger game. I may say, Mr. Stokes, that we will make you an allowance of fifty dollars a week during the three months allotted to the repurchase of the stock."

Stokes jumped to his feet, shouting: "No, no, you can't force me, Miss Benson, you can't blackmail me. It's the most high-handed piece of daylight robbery I ever heard of! What's to prevent my refusing,

walking over to the Sands County, withdrawing my funds and leaving this town? You haven't brought any charges against me."

He began pacing back and forth the length of the big directors' room, while Beth sat calmly at her desk apparently engaged in the routine work of her day. She vouchsafed no reply to Stokes's protestations. He went and gazed a long time out of the window into the busy street and across at the red brick façade of the building occupied by the Sands County Trust and Savings Company, where a small fortune lay snugly safeguarded in the name of Stokes.

Why hadn't he jumped twenty-four hours sooner? Why had he been such an optimistic fool? Why had he underestimated the dangers of the situation? Why hadn't he had sense enough to know that there are always forces at work against people like him? Why, during a lifetime of shady activities, hadn't he learned something?

Well, he had never been convicted of a crime. The sleeping indictment in the Ohio courts might go on and slumber indefinitely, its chances of coming to life ever more remote as witnesses scattered and memories of events became hazy. In another three years it ought to be dead from neglect. Stirred up now, however, it might land him in the penitentiary. Feeling against shady stock promotions had been running high of late. It wouldn't do to kick a sleeping dog.

Stokes knew his Alhambra proposition was as full of holes as a sponge. Superficially it looked good; but when scrutinized by an unsentimental district attorney, he knew it wouldn't hold water for a minute. His promotion literature, written with a guarded sophistication, and with an apparent frankness convincing to the gullible and innocent, would be interpreted not by what it actually said, but by its moral intent. Meticulous use of the words "should" and "would" in place of "shall" and "will"; frequent insertion of phrases like "it is our opinion that," "we believe we have every reason to think," and the blanket statement at the end of each piece of printed matter that "the information contained in this circular has been obtained from sources deemed by us reliable and trustworthy, but is not guaranteed," would not save him. He simply did not dare submit Alhambra to the searchlight of expert investigation.

And yet Miss Benson hadn't threatened. She had in no way compounded his guilt. She had not used such words as "crooked," "shady," "illegal," "unlawful," or "criminal." She had simply suggested to him the expediency of immediate restoration, and Stokes was as helpless as an infant. Suddenly he turned toward his tormentor.

"All right," he said. "You win."

Beth looked up from her work.

"Thank you, Mr. Stokes," she said. "I thought you'd see my point of view."

She picked up the telephone.

"Yes, Miss Benson," came the voice of the switchboard operator in the outer office. "Number?"

"Get Mr. French, of the Sands County Trust & Savings, please, Sadie," said Beth.

IX.

"THERE," said Miss Beth Benson to Mr. Edward Chesterton French half an hour later, when Mr. Stokes had taken a somewhat mournful departure, "that cleans that up."

Ed French looked at his competitor for the banking business of Templeton and vicinity, and it could not be said that his gaze lacked anything of admiration—or, perhaps better, a kind of wondering appreciation.

"Beth," he asked, "how do you do it?"

She smiled up at him from her father's big desk.

"Ed, can't you see? It's the only way. I blame myself that I didn't realize earlier just what harm a man like Stokes could do; and I must say I blame you even more. If the banks won't put the community ahead of their selfish profits—"

"But, Beth—"

Just what Mr. French intended to say the record does not show. He sighed, picked up his gloves and hat, and turned toward the door. Then, over his shoulder:

"How about lunch?"

Beth shook her head.

"Awfully obliged, Edward, but some other day. Having lunch at home with brother Joe. Poor chap, he's pretty lonesome with father and mother away. Going to the dance at the Country Club to-morrow night?"

Ed French pulled open the door into the corridor.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I'll know better to-morrow night. Nice warm day, isn't it?"

"Lovely," said the president of the Benson Bank of Templeton. She began sorting over a collection of miscellaneous papers on her desk, while the door of the directors' room closed with a click behind the back of the president of the Sands County Trust & Savings Company.

THE END.

IMMORTAL FRAUDS

AMAZING ABILITY OF THE MIMIC TESTATOR

By CAPTAIN HORATIO WRAGGE

ABOUT the middle of the thirteenth century there flourished in the Italian city of Florence a gifted youth named Gianni Schicchi—pronounced Skickey—who amazed everyone with his powers of mimicry.

Before he was eighteen he permitted himself the most extravagant liberties with the names and the possessions of the Florentines, but everybody forgave him because the things he did were so laughable. On one occasion he pretended to be an old lady, nearly a hundred years of age, who was noted for her charities. He imitated the voice, the manner and the appearance of this aged woman with such fidelity that he accumulated a considerable sum of money in her name. This old lady was subsequently tried upon a charge of fraud and was actually imprisoned until the truth was discovered. Gianni Schicchi would get himself up as the commander of the local garrison and perpetrate all sorts of imbecilities in the form of a drill of the troops until the laughter of the spectators made it obvious to the soldiers that they were the victims of a hoax. Nothing quite so wonderful had ever been heard of before in Florence.

Among his friends was a youth named Simone Donati who was afraid of being disinherited by his father, Buoso Donati. One day the old gentleman fell quite ill. The terror of Simone was extreme, for if his father bequeathed him nothing it would be useless to go to law. Gianni Schicchi reassured his young friend. "I will pretend to be your father," he said, "and I defy any lawyer to see through the trick."

The two youths hurried to the home of the invalid, whom they found at the point of death. Gianni Schicchi studied the sick man attentively for some minutes, for he wished his mimicry to be unusually true to the original. The sick man was shocked by the appearance of his prodigal son, who showed no concern for his father. His anxiety was all about the will. Old Buoso Donati refused to make one, saying that all his money would go to the church in the peculiar state of the law, for he had disowned his wicked son. The words had scarcely left his lips when the aged Donati fell dead upon his pillow.

Aided by his friend Simone Donati, the sly Gianni Schicchi lifted the corpse from the bed and hid it in a closet. Next the mimic took the empty place in the bed while the unnatural son hurried out for a notary. Simone explained that his father was at the point of death and wanted to make his will. The notary came in a hurry. Gianni Schicchi imitated the voice and the aspect of old Buoso Donati so faithfully that the notary was completely taken in.

In feeble tones, the impostor dictated a will in one clause of which some trival donations were made to the church. These being duly set forth by the unsuspicious notary, the mimic went on:

"I bequeath to Gianni Schicchi, in acknowledgment of his wonderful gifts, the sum of fifty florins."

This smart sum caused the wicked son of the dead man to wince. He danced about the room in his rage, but remembering the trick that was being played he said, in subdued tones:

"Dear father, leave Gianni Schicchi to me. I will give him his due at the right time."

"No," said the impostor from his place in the bed, "leave Gianni Schicchi to me, my son. I want him named in my will."

The wicked son had to give the impostor his own way, for the suspicions of the attorney must not be aroused. The incorrigible Gianni Schicchi next dictated:

"I also bequeath to Gianni Schicchi my mule."

Now the mule, as the Florentines called the animal, was really the finest and most famous horse in Tuscany, an animal to which the son of Buoso Donati was very partial. The face of Simone grew livid with rage, but he dared make no sign. His feelings were next lacerated when the impostor in the bed bequeathed a costly vase to Gianni Schicchi, not to mention other works of art which taken together made a snug legacy. The mimic took care to dictate a clause to the effect that the testator was moved to leave these things to Gianni Schicchi because of that young man's rare gifts as a mimic. "I have derived so much pleasure from the talents of my young friend that the least I can do is to compensate him according to his merits." Simone began to fear that his father's whole fortune would be left to his friend, but Gianni Schicchi was too clever to prolong the agony. He duly left the rest of the dead man's fortune to the son.

The will having been duly executed and signed by two of the servants as witnesses, the notary took his departure. From beginning to end the imposture was conducted with such genius that even the physician, who was called to the bedside at the instigation of the impish mimic, suspected nothing. When the two young friends were left alone, Simone upbraided his friend for the outrageous bequests he had injected into the will.

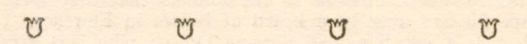
"All right," said Gianni Schicchi, "I will refuse to die. I can go on living in the character of Buoso Donati."

"What," asked the indignant Simone, "will you do with my father's body?"

"I will take a few days," answered Gianni Schicchi, "to think that over."

Understanding the boundless resources of his young friend, the son of the dead man capitulated. The body was brought out from its hiding place and put back in the bed. The funeral was one of the finest ever held in Florence, Gianni Schicchi shedding more tears than anyone else.

The occurrence of his name in other wills led to a suspicion that he might be doing a regular business with disinherited sons. There were hints that in one case at least he had suffocated a sick man and taken his place in bed where his mimicry enabled him to impose upon yet another notary. Gianni Schicchi made it a rule to insist upon liberal payment in advance and when it was not forthcoming he always bequeathed a tidy sum to himself. It was not possible to convict him of any crime because he lost his reason through an abuse of his gifts. He acquired the delusion that he was an old lady whom he had known as a boy and whose manner, voice and gestures he assumed permanently until he died. There were citizens who said that Gianni Schicchi resorted to this expedient in order to escape the consequences of his misdeeds. In his mature years he paraded the streets in a silk dress, with his hair down his back, imploring the passers-by to give him a little money because he was a poor old woman without home or friends. Until the day of his death there were two opinions about this performance, some Florentines insisting that he had gone quite mad whereas others believed that he was still exploiting his powers of mimicry. When he had passed away, his house was found filled with treasure, a circumstance suggesting that his mimicry might have been used upon a far greater scale than anyone ever supposed while he was alive.



PRAYER

BARBARIC in their splendor; gilded mosque
And minareted temple.
Chaste, the spired fingers pointing up.
Nestling cozily, the tiny chapels
Of the village.
Houses of worship.

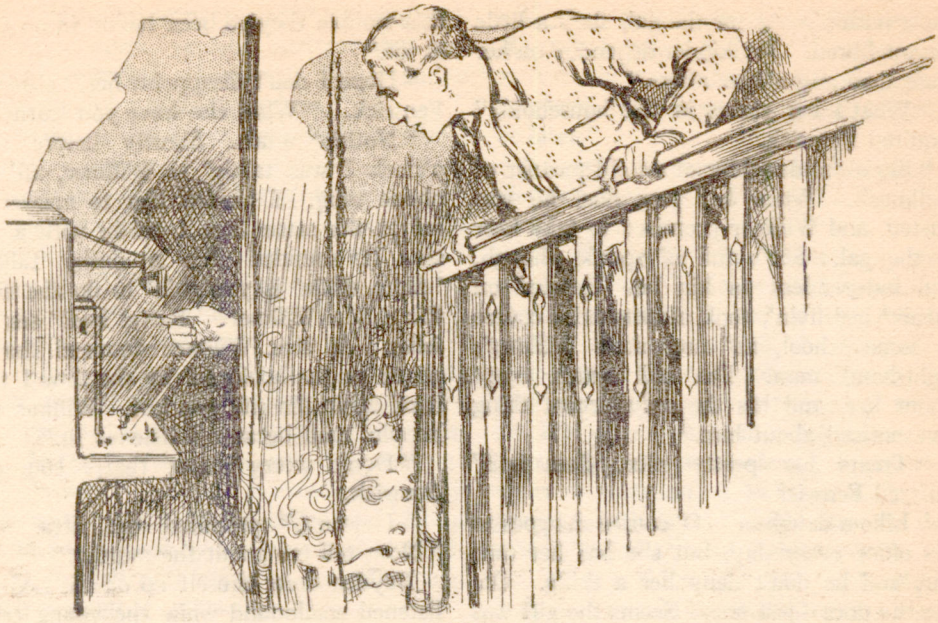
To chant of choir, and organ throb,
Incense rises. In the forest a savage bows,
And, on bits of scarlet paper,
A wrinkled suppliant makes devoté,
His plea.

Prayer has a thousand tongues.

And if sincere the call, and kindness to all,
The creed; all languages are one—
In prayer.

God has a thousand ears.

Leslie Ramón.



Voices

By GEORGE J. BRENN

Author of "Five Dollars—and No Sense," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

WARREN WILLMER, banker, engaged in great international financial dealings, is hounded by many urgent voices of all kinds coming to him over the telephone no matter where he goes. They finally drive him to the telephone company for relief. Charlie Fenwick, phonic criminologist, takes the case, with Seth Boyden, his old assistant, helping him. Willmer, Lorraine Carewe, his ward and secretary, and Pendleton Kirke and Otis King, his associates, admit having heard the voices. Kirke is shot in some mysterious way in his own home while King and Fenwick are in the house. Fenwick hears one of the voices, but cannot find out what they are urging Willmer to do.

CHAPTER VII.

FLIGHT.

WARREN WILLMER was finally prevailed upon to retire, but not before King, Boyden and Fenwick had agreed to remain at his home until daylight. Riggs showed them to their rooms, and Fenwick, too, was about to turn in when Boyden entered, clad in an old-fashioned nightshirt.

"We've got to talk some time, Charlie," he announced, "and things has been movin' so fast I ain't a bit sleepy. How about you?"

"I think ten minutes of conversation might help," admitted Fenwick. "What have you learned?"

"Everything an' nothin'," responded the old man. "Toll tickets hain't been a bit o' good, so far as tracin' calls is concerned. We're up against a queer bunch. These here millionaires want to be helped, but they don't want to help. Pendleton Kirke knew more than he cared to tell, but he's past helpin' us. Willmer knows a lot, but ain't sayin' a word. Only way to get anything out o' him is to scare it out of him. He seems to scare easy. Young King is the nicest actin' one of the lot, but he don't

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know nothin'. As for the gal, she's a little thoroughbred. I'm kinder dependin' on her more than any o' the others."

"What's her status in the household?" inquired Fenwick.

"She's the daughter of an old partner of Willmer's. When her paw died he was busted, and Willmer promised to take keer o' the gal. She's full o' spunk, though, and independent as kin be. Insisted on earnin' her livin', took a secretarial course in some school, an' now she's Willmer's right-hand man. The old man's crazy about her, and it's the only decent thing I've noticed about him."

"Treats her pretty nice, does he?" quizzed Fenwick.

"Like a daughter. O' course she goes to his office every day, but she has her own car, and he don't deny her a thing. Oh, yes, he does—jest one. Seems the girl was studyin' for the operatic stage before her dad cashed in, an' she's crazy to continue her studies. She don't stand much chanst, though, with two of 'em discouragin' her."

"Who are the two?" demanded Fenwick.

"Willmer an' young Otis King. Willmer thinks the environment would be bad for her, an' young King's afraid she'll fall head over heels in love with a career."

"H'm," mused Fenwick, a momentary shade passing over his face; "so that's how the land lies. Nice chap, King. Where did you get all this information, Seth?"

"Some from the gal, but most of it from Riggs. Riggs is more or less human when you get to know him. Riggs sez Miss Carewe has a wonderful voice. She sings at little musicales once in a while."

"How does Willmer feel about that?"

"I don't know about that," confessed Boyden, "but I'll find out in the mornin'."

"Please do. How did Miss Carewe know who I was when I entered the room tonight?"

"She didn't," grinned Seth. "She thinks you're John Bell. Y' see she answered the telephone when you called from Kirke's place, and when we finished talkin' I told her you was my boss. She wanted to know all about you, so I told her you were an expert telephone man and would clear up this trouble they've been havin' in no time at all."

"Hope I don't disappoint her," observed Fenwick. "What else have you learned?"

"Nothin' much. Shortly before nine o'clock I was talkin' to Willmer, an' the phone rang. I coaxed him to answer it, an' at the same time I cut in with a test set. It sounded like a darky talkin'. 'Ah'm askin' is you goin' to do the right thing, Mr. Willmer? Better had!' sez the feller. At that Willmer slammed the receiver on the hook, an' by the time I took it off again the call was lost. Willmer was hoppin' mad because I listened in."

"Don't worry about that," counseled Fenwick.

"I won't," promised the little man. "Now, tell me about the murder."

Boyden drew himself up on the bed and listened spellbound while the young criminologist gave a thrilling account of the events at Kirke's residence. He hung upon every syllable, gloried in the more baffling details, and spent considerable time examining the letter file and the small object which Fenwick had found in it.

"Queer thing, ain't it, Charlie? Jest before I came away I was regrettin' the fact that we didn't have a murder case instead of plain, ordinary blackmail. Now we've got both. Do you aim to handle the Newtown end of it alone?"

"I'm through with Newtown, Seth. I always do the important thing first. Besides, Corson is at Newtown, and while he's officially out of his territory, I know he won't leave the Pendleton Kirke case until he has the answer. I'm satisfied with that arrangement, because it will keep him out of our way. So far as we're concerned, the answer is in New York."

"It's a great shame," remarked Boyden plaintively. "First murder case I've been on, an' I ain't even seen the corpse! Well, I s'pose it can't be helped. What am I to do in the mornin'?"

"You're going to be pretty busy," advised Fenwick. "First, I want you to arrange to have all service observed from the telephone in this house and at King's place at Forest Hills. Have the chief operator keep special records. Next, see the River-

side wire chief and get him to make a voltmeter test on the two lines in this house."

Boyden whistled, then nodded approvingly.

"I see what you mean," he announced. "Gosh, mebbe that's the answer!"

"I doubt it, Seth, but we can't afford to overlook it. The next thing for you to do is to arrange with the operators at Willmer's office to let you sit in at the switchboard. Listen in on all calls for Willmer's personal extension. If any of them appear to involve our mysterious foes, endeavor to trace them. That ought to keep you busy all day. I'll be here at the house most of the time, but will keep in touch with you if I can. Now, let's get a few hours' sleep, or we won't be fit in the morning."

"Right," agreed the little man, jumping from the bed and making for the door.

"Oh, Seth!" shouted Fenwick. "How about the telephone in this room? Is the cord up connecting it with one of the trunks?"

"Took keer o' that a little while ago," announced Boyden proudly. "You're up on one trunk and the station in my room is plugged for the other one. If any one calls this house in the next few hours, no one's going to know it but Charlie Fenwick an' yours truly!"

On the heels of this announcement came the faintest imaginable tinkle of the telephone bell. Both men stood silent and motionless, as if awaiting a further and decided signal, but none came.

"What was that?" whispered Boyden.

"That was the condenser discharging," advised Charlie. "Some one has pulled out the plug, and we are no longer connected with central!"

He hurried to the telephone stand and lifted the receiver to verify the fact. A short examination assured him that his diagnosis was correct.

"Try the extension in your room, Seth," he directed; and Seth darted out of the room. In a moment he returned.

"Not connected," he reported; "and just as I came out of my room some one slipped into a room down the corridor. I didn't see who it was—just saw the door close."

"Which room?" queried Fenwick.

"The third from this one. I don't know whose room it is, but whoever left it must have gone down to the switchboard to make a call."

"I doubt it," observed Charlie. He returned to the telephone and again lifted the receiver and listened.

"You're wrong, Seth," he announced as he replaced the receiver. "Any one endeavoring to make a telephone call would have had to remove the plug from either your extension or mine. Upon completion of the call our extension would undoubtedly have been reconnected with the trunk. The person who went downstairs did so with the express purpose of shutting us off from communication with the outside."

"I guess you're right, Charlie. Whoever 'twas must have been readin' the seventeenth chapter o' Leviticus."

Somewhat amused, Fenwick waited. So did Seth, until he could wait no longer.

"Well, ain't ye gonna ask me what Leviticus says?" he demanded impatiently.

"What does it say, Seth?"

"It says: 'I will cut him off.' How's that? Purty good one that time, eh?"

"Pretty good, Seth. Now run along downstairs and connect our stations with central once more. Then go to bed. We need sleep."

"I need more sleep than you do," advised Boyden.

"How is that?" inquired Charlie.

"Oh, I do 'most everything slower than you do, an' I reckon I sleep slower than you, too. G' night, Charlie!"

"Good night, Seth," chuckled Fenwick, and he snapped off the lights, jumped into bed, and immediately fell asleep.

Three hours later he was awakened by a knock at his door. Without a word he slipped from the bed, released the catch and threw the door wide open. Boyden, fully clothed and fresh and cheerful, greeted him with a smile.

"It's seven thirty, Charlie," he announced. "Thought you'd like to get an early start to-day."

"All right, Seth," he yawned, vexed at the commonplace summons that had aroused him. "I'll be down shortly."

"I'll nose around a bit," observed the old man. "Mebbe I'll have something to tell you at breakfast."

A refreshing shower and the luxury of a shave entirely dissipated his desire for further sleep, and the young criminologist hurriedly dressed and descended the stairs.

"Good morning, sir," greeted Riggs. "We breakfast at all hours, sir. Miss Carewe has just been served. Will you join her?"

Fenwick assented and entered the dining room. Lorraine looked up from her grapefruit.

"Ambition could be made of no sterner stuff than yours," she smiled. "You've scarcely slept."

"How about yourself?" he challenged.

The smile faded.

"I haven't slept a wink," she confessed, as he took the chair Riggs indicated, facing her. "I've lain awake for ages, just thinking of poor Mr. Kirke and of Olive—that's his daughter, you know. Do you really think you can soon put an end to all these dreadful occurrences?"

"Undoubtedly," he assured her. "We shall need all the help we can get, however, and I'm looking to you for assistance."

Her eyes widened.

"Flattery, small talk—or do you really mean it?" she inquired. "There's little enough I know about these strange happenings. Of course I'll gladly answer any questions."

"I knew you would," he assured her. "Tell me who Mr. Willmer's neighbors are."

She gave him a graphic description of the owners or occupants of the adjoining mansions and apartment houses, their names resembling a page from the social register. She recited their hobbies and foibles, defining their social positions and their relations with Willmer and the other two members of the triumvirate. She could recall no reason for enmity between any of them and her employer and guardian. Fenwick listened attentively, thoroughly enjoying her vivacity, the clearness of her enunciation and the music of her lovely voice.

"Now tell me something about Otis King," he requested. "How does he stand in the estimation of Mr. Willmer? Has he ever had any trouble with Mr. Kirke?"

A momentary blush was followed by a look of apparent reluctance.

"The business of the triumvirate is colossal," she advised slowly. "It is carried on throughout the world. Mr. Willmer is a remarkable executive. So was Mr. Kirke. The essential details of the business were always at their finger tips, and I have seldom seen them hesitate when a crisis arose. Mr. King was always taken into their confidence, but he was handicapped by lack of experience. Sometimes he disagreed with them. On such occasions his personality and that of Mr. Kirke would clash. They were often at odds, but Mr. Willmer is wonderfully persuasive and convincing, and he usually straightened things out."

"Have they had any recent disagreements? Kirke and King, I mean."

"No, Mr. Bell—none that I know of."

"You would probably know if they had?" he suggested.

Again she blushed slightly.

"I think not, Mr. Bell. We are just good friends, and Otis is not the man to discuss his business problems with a woman."

They were interrupted by Riggs.

"Mr. Corson to see you, sir."

"Do you mind if I have him in?" asked Charlie.

"Not at all," responded Lorraine. "I'm really curious to see a great detective."

Riggs left the room, and the inspector strode in a moment later in his characteristic manner, a picture of vigor and keenness.

"I beg pardon," he murmured, observing the girl.

"Allow me to present Inspector Corson, Miss Carewe," introduced Fenwick.

"Delighted, Miss Carewe," acknowledged Corson. "I wouldn't think of intruding, but it's rather important."

"Won't you join us?" invited the girl.

"Thank you; I will have a sip of coffee, please. I've been going all night."

"Anything new or startling?" queried Fenwick.

"Yes; the Newtown police have arrested

Peters. It's ridiculous to suspect Peters, of course, when you have an alibi for him. I want to know how perfect that alibi is."

"Faultless and flawless," announced Fenwick. "I should call it unquestionable, were it not for the coincidence of the revolver."

"Some juries would hang a man on that evidence, Bell," grunted Corson. "But that's neither here nor there. Last night I kidded you and King a bit about your own position in this matter. Now I'm not kidding. How good is your own alibi, *and how good is King's?*"

The girl gasped and Fenwick chuckled.

"I'm afraid we can only corroborate each other's story, inspector," he advised.

"I know mighty well that you're not involved," interposed Corson hastily. "How about King? Were you seated in the blue room in a position to see him the moment he entered the house? Would he have had time to open the door of Kirke's study while Peters was bolting the front door?"

"Probably—yes. Why do you ask?"

"Peters tells me that King and Kirke were arguing when they drove up to the house. He could hear them when he hurried to admit Kirke, and as he opened the door King shouted from the car: "You'll tell me all you know, or have reason to regret it!"

"Well?"

"I've questioned Kirke's maids and eliminated them. I know that some one in the house was responsible for Kirke's death. It wasn't Peters, and it wasn't you. Who else was there?"

"Otis King," admitted Fenwick. "He sat beside me when the lights went out—when the sound of a shot rang out. He is absolutely innocent."

"Couldn't Mr. Kirke have taken his own life, inspector?" queried Lorraine anxiously.

"He couldn't kill himself and then dispose of the pistol," returned Corson. "I've ransacked that den from top to bottom. Now I want to see King."

Boyden entered the room, beaming.

"My assistant, Mr. Boyden, inspector," introduced Fenwick, and the two shook hands.

"Kin I talk right out in meetin', Mr. Bell?" inquired Seth. "We're all good friends."

Fenwick nodded.

"Remember how some one snuck downstairs last night an' disconnected our phones? Remember I told you how I seen some one shut the door o' the third room f'm yours? Well, sir, Riggs tells me that King was s'posed to sleep in that room. I trotted up to question him, but he wasn't there!"

Corson jumped to his feet.

"There you are!" he thundered. "What does that look like?"

"Flight!" answered Fenwick. "I wonder if it really is?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW MAN IN THE CASE.

"WHERE did King keep his car overnight?" demanded Corson.

"Riggs tells me it was still in front o' the house when the young feller turned in last night," advised Boyden.

"Do any of you know the license number?" catechized the inspector.

Fenwick turned to Lorraine, who appeared to hesitate. He nodded reassuringly.

"I know it," he admitted. "It's 23-773."

"Thank you, miss," acknowledged Corson. He walked across the room to the telephone table.

"Spring 3100," he directed. A pause. "Give me McKetchnie, operator. . . . Mac, this is Corson. Put down this number. Ready? 23-773. That's a tag number; stolen motor car. France-Corlies speedster; color, dark brown. Thief has owner's credentials. Find it this morning; within the hour if you can, and be sure to get the man who took it! When you do, call me on Newtown 4987. If I'm not there they'll tell you where I am. G'-by."

He jabbed the receiver on the hook with an air of satisfaction.

"If King is anywhere in the five boroughs with that car we'll find him," he assured Fenwick. "When we do he'll have to explain."

"Ingenious enough," acknowledged Charlie. "You certainly have wonderful ma-

chinery at your command. I rather fancy you'll get your man."

"Sure to," responded Corson. "I'm really interested in this case, and I mean to help the Queens people get to the bottom of it. Kirke was shot, and the revolver can't be found. Obviously he couldn't shoot himself. A number of people were locked in his house and were there when the shooting occurred. One of them is guilty. I'm gambling it was Otis King."

"What disposition did he make of the weapon afterward?" inquired Fenwick quietly.

Corson glared at him.

"Unfortunately," he observed slowly, "King was not searched before he left Newtown."

"Neither was I," reminded Fenwick unperturbed.

"I'm not overlooking that fact, either," retorted Corson, making for the door. "I'll see *you* later." With a good-humored smile and nod, he left them.

"Get down town right away, Seth," ordered Fenwick, "and follow out the program we discussed last night."

"I ain't had any breakfast," reminded the little man reproachfully.

"True enough, you haven't. Well, after breakfast, then. It's been rather an eventful breakfast, hasn't it?" he added, turning to Miss Carewe.

"Rather," she admitted, smiling wanly. She rang for Riggs to serve Boyden. "Just what are you going to do to-day, Mr. Boyden?" she inquired.

Seth reflected for a moment.

"In the words of Isaiah, sixty-fifth chapter, verse twenty-four: 'Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speakin', I will hear.'"

Her brows wrinkled in bewitching perplexity.

"He means," interpreted Fenwick, "that he's going down to the Willmer Building to listen in on some telephone conversations."

She laughed, a rippling spontaneous laugh that seemed to please Boyden.

"There ain't a thing about the telephone business the Bible don't tell about," he boasted.

"Unfortunately we're not so familiar with it as you, Mr. Boyden."

"It's a great pity," he announced. "I don't know what the young folks is comin' to these days."

Lorraine searched his serious countenance and successfully located the mischievous twinkle in his eyes that belied the lugubrious announcement.

"You're a dear," she decided, impetuously. "And what do you propose doing, Mr. Bell?" she asked, curiously.

"I contemplate spending the morning right here," he told her. "Perhaps we'll have some more mysterious messages, and if we do, I shall want to answer them."

"That's splendid. I shall be here most of the morning myself. Mr. Willmer is not going to the office to-day. I told Riggs to let him sleep. I felt so sorry for him last night and this morning. He was like a noble old lion at bay; grim, determined, and yet fully aware of his helplessness. If he really has enemies, they could choose no more opportune moment to strike than the present. You'll watch carefully, won't you?" she pleaded. "He needs protection."

"His condition is entirely psychological," declared Fenwick. "You should use your influence to induce a better state of mind. He appears to me to be suffering from a form of mental cowardice. But tell me, have you no fears for the safety of Otis King?"

"None," she advised, meeting his gaze tranquilly. "Chief Corson's hypothesis is absurd and ridiculous! I'll grant that his sudden disappearance apparently strengthens the chief's theory, but I dare say Otis will turn up shortly, and with a satisfactory explanation."

"I think and hope your conclusions are correct, Miss Carewe."

"Thank you."

"It's been kind o' you two young people to keep me comp'ny," announced Seth, who had completed a hearty breakfastt. "I'll be goin' down town now. Shall I have your bag sent here f'm the hotel?"

"Please do. I'm going to look over the switchboard and other telephone equipment," announced Fenwick as Lorraine arose.

"May I accompany you?" she inquired. "It's so marvelous and intricate that I'm forever wondering about it. I'll try not to annoy you by asking questions."

"Glad to have you, and don't be afraid to ask questions."

Seth departed, and Lorraine led the way to the switchboard in a small room at the rear of the house, which served as a sort of office to Willmer's housekeeper. Fenwick gave it a casual examination, idly throwing the keys back and forth.

"How is it possible for one girl to connect us with any of the thousands of telephones in this great city?" asked Lorraine.

"It requires two girls, not one," corrected Fenwick. "A call is handled by only one operator if both the called and calling parties are served by the same central office. A very small percentage of the calls made each day fall into this class.

"Your operator, however, has calling circuits to all other central offices. For instance, if you should ask for a Cortlandt number while your operator was repeating your number to you she would also be pressing a key which would connect her with an operator in the Cortlandt central office. Over that private wire your operator would give the number to the other operator, and the other girl would repeat a mystic number which tells the Riverside operator which 'trunk' to plug your call in on. In the meantime the Cortlandt operator has already plugged in your number and connected it with the trunk she has designated, so that when your girl plugs in on that trunk your connection is completed. Then a machine starts ringing the bell of the person you have called. Perfectly simple, isn't it?"

"I should call it uncanny," observed Lorraine. "There's another thing I want to ask you. Would it be possible for some one to tap our wires?"

"For the purpose of listening in? Yes; that would be entirely possible."

"No; that isn't quite what I mean. Would it be possible for a wire tapper to send messages over our wire? To talk over it?"

"Yes, indeed. In fact, I'm going to work on that theory this morning. You will recall that I questioned you regarding the neighbors? I had that thought in mind at the time. It hardly seems probable, however, since it would be detected sooner or later."

"I see. What part of the telephone service are you and Mr. Boyden responsible for?"

"I am a wire chief, which really means an electrician. The wire chief is responsible for the mechanical end of the telephone central office—the wiring, the dynamos and storage batteries, the cables and fuses. Each wire chief has a staff of trained men to assist him either within or outside the central office. These men repair any injury to the wires or instruments as soon as it is reported. Seth is an 'outside trouble man,' usually called a 'trouble shooter.'"

"What a ridiculous title! Mr. Boyden is the last man in the world I would imagine going about looking for trouble. I suppose you have all kinds of weird and uncanny instruments to assist you?"

"We have," smiled Fenwick. "We have, for instance, a voltmeter, which enables us to determine if current is flowing off a line, and which indicates whether trouble on a circuit is inside or outside the central office, and sometimes tells us the nature of the trouble. We also have a Wheatstone Bridge, an instrument by which we determine the precise locality at which a break has occurred. There are many other devices the wire chief uses each day."

"And what makes a telephone talk?" queried Lorraine, naïvely. "Of course I'm frightfully nontechnical, but I don't know any other way to word my question."

"I understand," he assured her. "There are three essential parts to an ordinary telephone. These are the transmitter, the source of current and the receiver. Telephone current is very feeble, and really plays a less important part in a telephone conversation than the vibrations of your voice."

He unscrewed the rubber mouthpiece of the transmitter and revealed a sheet of extremely thin, flexible metal.

"This is a diaphragm," he announced. "When sound waves strike it it moves a tiny distance, sufficient to move a small rod

up and down. The rod is fixed to the center of the diaphragm and at the other end to a small disk of carbon. This carbon disk, or button, rests in a cup of the same material. The cup is loosely filled with grains of carbon, which have a high electrical resistance. In other words, they choke back electricity.

" The current must pass through the carbon cup, the carbon grains and to the carbon button before it can reach the receiver at the distant point. The more scattered the grains are the greater their resistance, and the less electricity can pass. The less electricity, the less noise at the other end of the wire. So when you speak into the transmitter the diaphragm moves, pressing the grains tighter together, or letting them rest loosely. Each tiny movement caused by the vibration of your voice changes the force of the current and reproduces sound in the receiver at the other telephone."

" Sheer magic!" exclaimed the girl. " I'm sorry to take up so much of your time, and I'm going to leave you to your own devices. If you want me, Riggs will find me for you. Thank you for my lesson in telephony."

" Don't mention it!" murmured Fenwick, his frankly admiring gaze following her as she left the room.

He again directed his attention to the switchboard, removing the panel beneath it to examine the wiring. An examination of the extension stations and jacks for portable instruments on the lower floor of the house followed. Returning to the switchboard he connected the library extension with central and then ascended the rear staircase to the second floor, where he made a similar inspection of the equipment. The maids were busy putting the rooms in order, and regarded him curiously as he made his somewhat perfunctory examination. When he reached Lorraine Carewe's boudoir he hesitated until a somewhat overvivacious French girl assured him he might enter.

He walked directly to the escritoire on which the telephone stood and removed the little bisque doll, whose rose-colored crinoline skirt concealed the instrument. The telephone was of special finish, old-rose in color, harmonizing with the general tone of the room. Scarcely giving it a glance he carefully replaced the bisque creation and walked from the room, the maid laughing audibly as he left. He flushed to his ears, realizing how evident his confusion had been, and how unimpressive his examination. Milady's boudoir had unnerved him, and he had only a vague impression of its appointments, daintiness and charm.

" Idiot!" he growled in self-reproach, and then hesitated on the threshold of the library. Miss Carewe was engaged in letter writing.

" May I come in?" he inquired.

" Surely." She laid aside her pen. " Why, what has happened, Mr. Bell?"

" Nothing," he assured her, his blushes deepening, and once more he mentally cursed his diffidence.

Her eyes sparkled mischievously.

" Sure?" she inquired.

The ringing of the telephone bell afforded him a welcome respite, but caused him to recall that he had connected the instrument with central, had decided to visit the library, and had intuitively felt that Lorraine would be there when he arrived. Lorraine answered the telephone.

" It's Mr. Boyden calling you," she announced, offering him the instrument. He conversed with Boyden for five minutes, and when he replaced the receiver on the hook, had entirely recovered his composure. Miss Carewe was sealing some envelopes when he turned to her.

" Boyden's had a lead," he informed her, " but it looks as if we're up against a very ingenious gang. One of the voices asked for Mr. Willmer at the office a while ago, and Boyden took the call. He engaged the fellow in conversation and at the same time scribbled directions on a pad for one of the P. B. X. operators to follow.

" First he told her to find out who was calling, and she learned that the call was from a coin box station at the Grand Central. Then he told her to learn the numbers of the other public telephones in booths adjacent to the one from which the call was made, and to have the operator ring one of them. He hoped to attract some one's attention and have them nab the fellow who was talking.

"All the phones were reported busy, however, and the owner of the voice apparently grew suspicious and hung up. Boyden persisted, and finally got in communication with the Grand Central people, who investigated. They found that the fellow had taken the receivers off the hooks of all the other coin box telephones before making his call, for the purpose of preventing any such attempt as that made by Boyden. The operator can't ring, you know, if the receiver is off the hook."

"And the man got away?" she asked, troubled.

"I'm afraid so. Boyden has gone up to look around and ask questions, but it seems sort of hopeless to expect him to learn anything about a single individual in the masses of transient persons at the Grand Central."

"You haven't been as successful as you hoped then?" she inquired.

"We haven't done anything spectacular, but we're making progress. We've been gathering together a number of tiny particles for use in a mosaic, and we'll soon be in a position to put the particles together. When we do we expect to have a picture that any one can understand."

"Soon?"

"Very soon, I think."

She smiled and seemed reassured, her manner changing as she changed the subject.

"You wanted me to remind you to tell me something," she said. "Something about what an educated Arab once told you."

Fenwick was uncomfortably affected by the reminder, and once more was apparently covered with confusion.

"Some other time, please," he responded hastily. "N-not now."

"Do tell me now," she persisted.

"I- -I can't. I don't know you well enough. I don't know whatever possessed me to make such a statement. Please forget all about it."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she declined positively. "I've half a notion it was about me, anyway. Come, Mr. Telephone Man, what was it?"

"It would be presumptuous — impertinent, for me to tell you."

"I don't believe it. Tell me; I'm waiting!"

"You insisted, remember," he advised, struggling to retain his composure. "This Arab once described to me a Moslem's idea of feminine beauty, and had reduced it to a kind of mathematical formula quite easy to remember. He said, first of all, that a woman must possess four attributes that are black—hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, and pupils. Then four that are white—skin, hands, teeth, and the white of the eye; four that are red—cheeks, lips, tongue, and gums; four that are long—back, arms, fingers, and—and limbs. Lastly, four that are small—eyebrows, nose, lips, and fingers. This, he said, was Allah's conception of beauty."

Fenwick regarded the opposite side of the room with well-simulated interest, while the girl repressed a smile.

"And why should you feel it incumbent upon you to acquaint me with the aberrations of some harem-loving scamp of an Arab?" she demanded sternly.

"They are not aberrations," he denied stoutly. "Can't you see that, despite the mathematical feature of it, he's really described a wonderfully beautiful woman?"

"Well, what of it, Mr. Bell?" she persisted. "Why tell me?"

"Because his description occurred to me the minute I saw you," he blurted. "You —you are the girl he described!"

There was a moment's uncomfortable silence, broken by the girl.

"You should surely succeed in running down the voices, Mr. Bell," she declared. "You are *so* observant! I suppose I should feel flattered at your kindly interest, your knowledge of the color of my eyelashes, gums and tongue. You promised that your statement would be—"

"Hullo, Lorraine," greeted Otis King, sauntering into the room and dropping into a chair. "'Morning, Bell." He sensed a constrained situation and sought to relieve it. "Been bottling up the voices, you two?"

"Where have you been, Otis?" asked the girl.

"Just came in with Boyden. He picked me up at the Grand Central."

"What?" she exclaimed, directing a worried glance at Fenwick.

"At the Grand Central. Say, Bell, how did Inspector Corson know my car was stolen?"

"Was it stolen?" asked Fenwick quietly.

"Sure was. I heard it moving away from the house this morning, just as I was getting ready for bed. Slipped on my things and gave chase for hours in a taxi. Lost and found it several times. Finally picked up the trail way up the Drive, headed the fellow off, chased him down town and lost him in the crowd. Then, at the Grand Central, I stumbled right on to the fellow, in the clutches of an officer, who insisted that the theft had been reported by Corson!"

"It had," advised Fenwick. "Did they get the thief?"

"Corson and Boyden have him downstairs now. Shall I tell you what he looks like?"

"Please, Otis," begged the girl.

"Well, he's an Italian, about twenty-four, dark complexioned, dirty, illiterate, wears a cap and smokes cigarettes."

"Why, that's the same as the man you described this morning!" advised the girl, turning to Fenwick. "That's the description you gave of the owner of the voice!"

"Right-o," asserted King. "Just what I've been thinking. Come down and have a look. Corson wants to see both of you, anyway."

CHAPTER IX.

NICK NAPOLIELO.

THE Italian sat stolidly in an easy chair at Corson's side. Boyden occupied another chair in the doorway leading to the hall, as if to discourage any attempt at flight. As Fenwick, King, and Miss Carewe entered the room the prisoner's face showed a momentary flash of animation which as quickly disappeared.

"Which one of them do you know, Nick?" demanded Corson, observant as ever.

"Nobody, boss," responded Nick promptly.

"That's a lie, but we'll let it pass for the present. Were it not for a fabric of lies there would be no mystery to this case at all. It's merely a question of determining what is false and what is true. You'd all be better off if you'd come through with the truth. Mr. King, for instance, learned that I had reported his car as stolen. I did that so that the police would find him for me after his significant disappearance. Then he turns up with the story that it really had been stolen, and that he had been endeavoring to catch the thief. Doesn't that strike you, Mr. King, as stretching the long arm of coincidence a bit too far?"

King shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me, old chap, that you are the lad who did the stretching. You reported the car stolen when you really believed it to be in my possession. You are entirely responsible for the coincidence. A fabric of lies, did you say?"

Corson glared at him.

"Unfortunately," he advised, "I am compelled to fight fire with fire. You are in a particularly unenviable position. What were you and Pendleton Kirke quarreling about when you drove up to his house last night?"

"The voices," answered King promptly.

"What about them?"

"Kirke intimated that he knew more than he cared to tell. I insisted on sharing his knowledge, and what was originally a mild dispute suddenly assumed the proportions of a hot altercation. It ended, however, when he entered his home at Newtown."

"Or a few minutes later," added the inspector significantly. "Why did you wait in your car while he entered the house?"

"Kirke promised to get some papers for me."

"Indeed! Mr. Bell, doesn't it strike you that we are a pair of idiots not to have investigated that phase of the case?"

"Not at all," responded Fenwick quietly.

"Why not?" demanded Corson. "Presumably the papers were in Kirke's den. They have been referred to on several occasions, but I have not heard anything about what happened to them. Are they still in the den, or did they disappear after Kirke

was killed? What sort of papers were they?"

Both Fenwick and King began to speak at once, but Fenwick nodded to King and the latter answered Corson.

"They were documents of a confidential nature, the property of Willmer, Kirke, and King. They were in the center drawer of Kirke's desk. Mr. Bell obtained them for me while we were waiting for you to appear. They are now in Mr. Willmer's possession."

"Is that correct, Bell?"

"Absolutely. They were in an envelope addressed to King."

"Why didn't you take the trouble to advise me?" persisted Corson.

"It struck me as a detail of no consequence, and is as excusable as the fact that you entirely ignored all references to the papers."

"H-m! Mr. Boyden tells me that one of the voices telephoned Willmer's office today, and that the call was traced to the upper level, Grand Central Station. King was at the Grand Central at the time the call was received, and a few minutes later encountered the officer who arrested Nick. Did you make a telephone call, Mr. King, from the Grand Central?"

"I did."

"Who did you call?"

"Police headquarters, to report the theft of my car. They told me it had already been reported by you."

"You made no other calls?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Please answer my question."

"I have nothing to say," responded King coldly.

"Mr. Boyden, what sort of a voice did you hear over the phone?"

"Well, inspector, I'd say that the feller who was talkin' was tryin' to disguise his voice."

"Would you recognize the voice? Had you ever heard it before?"

Boyden hesitated.

"Well, sir," he proceeded, "just as soon as I heard it I kinder thought to myself: 'That feller sounds like Mr. Otis King!'"

Lorraine gasped at this announcement, and steadied herself by grasping the back of a chair.

"Is it true, Otis?" she demanded. "Are we to believe that you are leagued with this murderous band?"

"Not a bit of it, dear girl," he denied lightly. "Old Hawkshaw and the parson here seem to have me up a bit of a tree, but it's only a momentary diversion, 'pon my honor. Let Messrs. Corson and Boyden proceed with their bizarre entertainment while we remain mute but interested spectators."

"Smart, aren't you?" yelled Corson, losing his temper at this show of King's indifference and contempt. "You know perfectly well that I haven't got enough of a case against you yet to hold you, especially if you turn loose your high-priced legal talent! Well, I don't give a damn how many millions you have in back of you, I'm going to get you!"

King returned the inspector's glare with a chuckle.

"Let me know if I can be of assistance," he volunteered.

"You can," announced Corson grimly. "Hereafter I won't make a single move on this case unless you are with me. You are going to be my first assistant."

"You overwhelm me with honors," protested Otis. "However, I accept. What's our first job? Shall it be the voices, or the murderer of poor old Pendleton Kirke?"

"Otis!" reproved the girl, shocked by the young millionaire's flippant manner. She twisted at her handkerchief with both hands and glanced uncertainly about the room. "I—I can't stand this! I am going to my room."

She hurried past Boyden and fairly ran across the hall and up the stairs. King's anxious gaze followed her as she fled, and then a far-away look dawned in his eyes.

"On some happier occasion," he murmured to no one in particular, "*some one* is going to pay for this!"

"I'd like to question your prisoner, inspector," announced Fenwick.

"Very well. He says his name is Nick Napolielo, and that he doesn't know a soul in this house. I don't believe a word he says."

"Nick," began Fenwick, "why did you take Mr. King's car?"

"Joy-ride. Tha's all, boss. I t'ink, mebbe, I get me my girl, I tak-a her leetle ride. Then this mans, he's a-chase me, so I keep goin'."

"Do you expect me to believe that your girl would accompany you on an automobile ride at four o'clock in the morning?"

"Sure. Lucia, she's a go in an auto any time. She's a-crazy for machine."

"What were you going to do with the car when you finished your ride?"

"Justa leave some place. On da street, mebbe."

Since the inception of the case the telephone had played so evil a part that the aversion to it which Willmer so consistently displayed had been communicated in a lesser degree to all the others. Every time it rang the sudden hush and uneasiness that followed was dramatic.

As Nick answered Fenwick's question the bell jangled furiously, and Corson jumped from his chair. Boyden half arose, and Fenwick wheeled about, facing the instrument, and then stood motionless. King stretched languidly, both hands deep in his trouser pockets, and yawned with affected boredom. The prisoner looked from one to another, bewildered, and then laughed.

"Ah, gee! Whassa matt'?" he demanded. "She's no gonna hurt you!"

"Go to the switchboard, Seth," ordered Fenwick; and the little man silently slipped from the room. Charlie lifted the receiver to his ear, and Corson stood at his elbow as if he hoped to hear fragments of the caller's conversation.

"Mr. Willmer's residence, Bell speaking," announced Fenwick.

"This is Willmer," answered the financier. "Come up to my den when you get time, will you?"

"I'll be right up, sir." He replaced the receiver on the hook.

"It was Mr. Willmer," he advised. "He wants to see me. Where's Nick?"

"Damn it! He's gone!" barked Corson, flying to the door, which he slammed violently as he left the house.

Charlie regarded King quizzically.

"Well?" inquired King.

"Where's Nick?" asked Fenwick quietly. "Is he still in the house?"

The junior member of the triumvirate appeared to be disconcerted by the young wire chief's manner.

"He left by the front entrance when you answered the telephone."

"Didn't you know enough to stop him?"

"You forget that I am now Inspector Corson's deputy. I was merely awaiting orders from my chief."

Boyden reappeared and immediately noted Nick's disappearance.

"Where's that Italian feller?" he demanded.

"Mr. King permitted him to walk out while I was telephoning," advised Fenwick. "Corson is out looking for him."

"I'll do some lookin' myself," exclaimed Seth, making for the door. As it closed after him Fenwick again turned to King.

"This won't do at all," he announced. "Corson has real evidence against you, and can make things decidedly unpleasant if he cares to. What object had you in furthering his escape?"

"I didn't want to see the poor devil suffer for a mere lark," protested King earnestly. "I believe his story about taking the car for a joy-ride."

"Your position is obviously unfair," pointed out Fenwick. "I am endeavoring to assist you and your associates, and have taken you into my confidence. For some inexplicable reason you are now obstructing Corson's investigation and impeding my own efforts. The absurdity of your excuse for permitting Nick's escape is patent. Are you going to force me to subscribe to Corson's theory? Am I to believe that yours is one of the voices?"

"I hope not, old chap," responded King. "You know perfectly well that I had nothing to do with Pendleton Kirke's death. I give you my word that I have respected your confidence and haven't breathed a word to a soul about Charlie Fenwick being on this case. But I can't for the life of me understand why Corson should suspect or endeavor to incriminate a chance passer-by who makes off with my motor car."

"We will not argue, Mr. King," said Fenwick, disappointed. "You have ventured the opinion on a number of occasions that your partners knew more than they

cared to tell about the voices. I am compelled to feel that your own position does not differ materially from theirs. When you feel at liberty to divulge such information as you have, I shall feel it incumbent on me to resume the frank attitude that is due an honest client. Until then, my methods, progress and all other actions will be directed toward completing this case for Mr. Reeves, of the telephone company, who is alone responsible for my assignment to it."

Riggs answered the door and admitted Corson and Boyden just as Willmer strode into the room. The financier halted as he sensed a constrained attitude on the part of the occupants.

"What's the row, gentlemen?" he inquired.

"He got away," advised Corson, addressing Fenwick and ignoring Willmer. "Probably boarded a passing bus. Boyden and I scouted around for several blocks, but saw nothing of him."

"Mr. King's car was stolen early this morning, Mr. Willmer," informed Fenwick. "Inspector Corson's men caught the fellow and brought him here. The inspector believed him to be more than a common thief. While we were conferring in this room he escaped."

"Escaped from four able-bodied men?" queried Willmer. "How?"

"Your brilliant partner permitted him to make a get-away while you were talking to Bell over the telephone," answered Corson bitterly.

"Who? When?" demanded Willmer in staccato tones. "I haven't been talking to Bell."

"Neither he has," put in Boyden. "I listened in at the switchboard, and while the voice sounded like Mr. Willmer, the call was from outside the house!"

CHAPTER X.

THE TWELFTH HOUR.

HIS face drawn and haggard, Willmer paced the room nervously, while Corson, Boyden, King and Fenwick regarded him mutely and uncomfortably. They fully realized the terrific strain he was under, and even Corson felt sorry for him. The financier had passed a sleepless night, but had regained some semblance of control over his nerves in the morning.

In his characteristice manner, curt and decisive, he had cabled the news of Kirke's death to the wife and daughter in France, had arranged for the care of the body of his late partner, and, in lieu of eagerly sought interviews by the newspaper men, had issued a general statement to the press. Now, clad in somber mourning garb, ashen-hued of countenance, he walked up and down the room as if he were alone, a broken, hopeless, distraught man.

Riggs appeared in the doorway, standing aside to let Miss Carewe precede him into the room. As she entered, Willmer threw back his shoulders, as if struggling to master his emotions, and forced a wan smile.

"My dear," he said simply, taking both her hands in his, "I've scarcely seen you to-day. Were you equal to the task of getting off those messages? If you weren't, don't bother. I'll have Kavanagh run up from the office and take care of them."

"The letters have gone," she assured him, "and I would welcome any additional work you might give me. I should like to have something to occupy my mind and time. Can I be of any further assistance to you?"

A slow, negative shake of the head answered her. Then he said: "I've been thinking that it would be a fine thing for you to get away for a few weeks. The Trents, perhaps—or you could visit Dot Cameron, in South Orange. This is scarcely a proper atmosphere for a girl like you. We seem to be living in an environment that I believed was peculiar to the dime novel. You're not looking well, my child. A month of hikes and rides through the South Mountain Reservation, with some country club activities in the evening, would banish the constantly serious, care-worn expression I've noticed lately. What do you say?"

"I say no," she answered unhesitatingly. "It is my duty to repay you for the care and the home you have given me. My father's daughter would never run away from trouble, and right now I must be here

where I can help. These gentlemen, Mr. Bell and Mr. Corson, will tell you that I have helped. Why, even now, I have brought Riggs here because he knows something that may help us."

"Indeed?" queried Willmer, noticing the servant for the first time. "What is it, Riggs?"

"It's about the person who just escaped, sir. I understand that he claimed he knew no one in this house, and had merely been passing by when he conceived the notion of—er—borrowing Mr. King's car. So I have just been telling Miss Carewe that the man had been in this house before."

"What?" demanded Willmer. "When was this?"

"Early this morning, sir. After I had shown the gentlemen to their rooms, and every one was retiring, I was making the rounds, assuring myself that the doors and windows were properly fastened. As I was about to secure the front doors this Italian chap sauntered down the stairs, cap in hand and a cigarette in his mouth.

"'Match?' he says to me, cool enough.

"I was so taken by surprise I hastened to oblige him. He struck the match, lit the cigarette and walked past me. It was not until he was halfway out of the house that I grew suspicious.

"'Who have you been seeing, sir?' I asked, knowing I had not admitted him.

"'Mr. Willmer,' says he. 'I'm from the telephone company. Good night.'

"With that he shuts the door and goes down the steps. I finished locking up, and then went to my room. He must have waited outside for about five minutes, sir, for it was fully that long before I heard Mr. King's car pull away from the house."

"Weren't you suspicious then?" asked Fenwick?"

"No, sir. There have been so many strange happenings lately that I'm afraid to question anything that occurs."

Willmer dropped into a chair weakly, moistening his lips.

"Did this man really call on you, Mr. Willmer?" asked Corson.

"No," murmured the financier faintly.

"Do you know anything about him, Bell?"

"Not a thing," responded Fenwick.

"I shall not compel Mr. King to lie by asking him the same question," announced Corson. "It is logical to conclude that the man who allowed him to escape is the man he came to see."

"Thoughtful of you," rejoined King, "but I'm not tremendously interested in gaining your good opinion. I am accountable to my partner for my actions, however, and feel that the occasion demands that I register a denial in his presence. Mr. Willmer, to my knowledge I never saw this man until I found him in possession of my car at the Grand Central this morning."

"That is all that is necessary, Otis," advised Willmer. "I believe you, my boy."

"You are too gullible, Mr. Willmer," warned Corson. "The fellow who escaped knows something about Pendleton Kirke's death, and is undoubtedly the owner of one of the voices."

"I should like to ask Riggs," piped up Boyden, "whether this Eyetalian talked with a foreign accent when he was leavin' the house this morning?"

"No, sir, he did not," answered Riggs respectfully. "He talked as well as you or I."

"Did you make a search to see if he took anything?" persisted the little man.

"Yes, sir. I am quite sure nothing is missing."

"That will do, Riggs, unless the gentlemen have some other questions to ask," advised Lorraine. Both Corson and Fenwick indicated that they had no desire to question him further, and Riggs withdrew. The girl turned to her guardian.

"I *have* been of assistance, haven't I?" she asked.

"Yes, my child; you have shown me that the voices have intruded on the privacy of my home. I am not safe anywhere. I am going to my den."

He raised himself feebly from the chair and walked slowly to the door, where he hesitated.

"Bell," he said, as if to deliberately snub Corson, "I am relying on you. You promised to clear this matter up within forty-eight hours. You've been on the case twelve hours. If you can prevent further startling

developments during the next thirty-six, and can end this devilish business, I may be able to live through it. Do your best, will you?"

"I will, of course," assured Fenwick. "The case was mysterious enough when I took it, but the developments of the last twelve hours have been extremely so. Each new occurrence, however, despite the element of mystery, has contributed to the support of a general theory I have formed. I am more than pleased at the progress I have made, and expect to have a satisfactory solution of the whole affair very soon. In the meantime I can positively assure you that there is not the slightest chance of any one doing you physical injury."

"I am not so sure," commented Willmer, turning on his heel and slowly making his way upstairs.

"You are very reassuring, Mr. Bell," observed Lorraine gratefully. "If I thought Mr. Willmer was really in danger, I would urge you to plead with him to give up the fight. I imagine it is all a question of money, and he has so much more than he needs."

"You are suggesting that he buy off the voices?" asked Fenwick.

She nodded.

"What if a principle is at stake?" she inquired defensively. "Mr. Willmer's happiness and peace of mind are worth a great deal, not only to him, but to others. If I felt for a moment that the voices were responsible for Mr. Kirke's death, I would forever reproach myself for not having urged my employer to give in. How much it would have meant to Olive and to Mrs. Kirke if money could have prevented this tragedy!"

"Feminine logic," commented Corson. "Willmer's a big man—the kind who will fight for a principle. He realizes the duty he owes to society, and will not encourage blackmail. Despite his discourtesy to me, I admire him for the stand he has taken."

"You do not read character well, Mr. Corson," disagreed the girl. "From my knowledge of the triumvirate, I would say that the only member of it genuinely interested in ethics and willing to fight for a principle is in this room. Next to him I should place Mr. Kirke. As for Mr. Willmer, he would wage war to the bitter end, not because character and right were involved, but because of money. Wealth is his god. I do not consider it disloyal to him to acquaint you with these facts. It is his one big human failing. In everything else he is a superman."

"But Mr. Willmer is quite a philanthropist," protested Corson.

"Not at all," Lorraine advised. "The triumvirate supports certain worthy charities, and Messrs. King and Kirke often made contributions from their personal funds. Mr. Willmer never did. This information is not public property, and I trust you will regard it as confidential. It seemed my duty to acquaint you with it. If you fail to relieve the situation in any other way, I think you should persuade Mr. Willmer that his only hope lies in negotiating with the voices and buying them off."

"It is my opinion that we should begin bargaining at once," announced Corson, "but not in good faith. Such tactics eventually lead to some sort of contact with the culprits and often afford an opportunity to take them into custody."

"I fear you underestimate the ability of this gang, chief," observed Fenwick. "Just postpone the operation of that plan for another day, and give me a chance to work out my own theory."

Corson shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you think, Otis?" asked Lorraine.

"You've probably given Mr. Bell information about Mr. Willmer which he should have had long ago," agreed King. "Now that he has it he should be given an opportunity to use it. The voices have been acquainted with every move we have made. They will merely laugh at the notion of bargaining along the lines suggested by Mr. Corson, if I am a judge."

"You appear to have rather definite information as to their reactions," Corson pointed out caustically.

"Why shouldn't I?" retorted King. "Isn't it your theory that I sing tenor in their quartet?"

"Don't tease, Otis," begged Lorraine.

"Why don't you tell the inspector all you know and coöperate with him."

"I'm perfectly willing to, Lorraine, in all that immediately concerns the subject we are discussing. The inspector refuses to coöperate, however, since he will not permit me to draw the line between what I know to be pertinent and what is not."

"Oh, you men!" exclaimed Lorraine, perplexed. She left the room.

"What do you think about Nick telling Riggs he was from the telephone company?" asked Corson.

Fenwick smiled.

"I've been thinking about that," he admitted. "Of course, it was an explanation that Riggs would be very likely to accept, in view of recent occurrences, and Nick undoubtedly knew this. On the other hand the statement may warrant further investigation. Seth, I'm going to leave it to you to discover whether or not Nick is or ever was a telephone man. Get busy."

"Right," assented Seth, who had listened intently to the entire conversation. "As it says in the fifth chapter of Ezra, verse fifteen: 'Search may be made in the book of the records.' I'll start right away."

"And, Seth," continued Fenwick as the little man started from the room, "tell that Riverside wire chief to get busy on the voltmeter test if he hasn't already done so."

"Very well," agreed Boyden.

"Where does Boyden have to go?" queried Corson.

"Riverside central office on West Eighty-Ninth Street first," advised Fenwick. "Then he may have to go to the Central Testing Bureau on West Fifty-Eighth Street, and perhaps to the headquarters building on Dey Street."

"Perhaps Mr. King would drive him down in the car," suggested the inspector. "It would save a lot of time."

"Gladly," consented King.

"If you'll come back here you may be able to assist me," Corson advised.

"Never fear," responded the young financier. "I'll be back. I haven't the slightest reason for running away."

"A millionaire can't run away, Mr. King."

"Oh, so you know that, too, do you?" smiled King, understandingly, as he left with Boyden.

As the pair left the house Fenwick quickly turned to Corson.

"You wanted to get rid of King," he accused. "Why?"

"I wanted to talk to you about him. We rode down from the Grand Central in his car. We were crowded; it's one of those speed buggies. Nick sat on my knee and Boyden rode on the running board, while King drove. Nick had an excellent opportunity to whisper to King, and took advantage of it. King's manner changed from that moment, and while he endeavored to assume his usual attitude of bored indifference, I could see that he was worried. I'd give anything to know what Nick said to him."

"Interesting," commented Fenwick, noncommitally.

Corson regarded him with disgust.

"Is that all you have to say?" he demanded.

"That's all," smiled Charlie. "I'm not going to venture the opinion that King is one of the voices or is directing them. I'm not going to make a similar statement regarding Nick, and I'm quite sure neither of them are implicated in Pendleton Kirke's death. You've had too many theories, inspector, and have had to give each one up in turn as you adopted a new one. My theory has assumed shape very slowly, but I still find it tenable, and I mean to stick to it."

"When you find it untenable, Charlie, I'm going to attempt to dicker with the voices, and I'll wager I make an arrest."

"Good enough!" agreed Charlie. "Don't attempt it, however, until my theory *is* untenable. In the meantime, you ought to devote all your time to solving the mystery of Pendleton Kirke's death."

Corson glared at him half savagely.

"You want me to ask you outright how that trick was pulled," he growled. "Well, I'm not going to do it. If you could find out, so can I. I'm going back to Newtown. When King returns tell him to join me at Kirke's place. So-long."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

A Pound of Rubber

By DON CAMERON SHAFER

"ALL those wild Mangeromas of the jungle are possessed with devils. They are fit only for the rubber fields and extermination. I, Joao da Calvero, one of the oldest *seringales* of the Amazon, should know—*Parque,* have I not many times purchased these worthless savages as new conscript labor for my rubber gathering?"

With descending darkness the sobbing wail of the howling monkeys died out and the nocturnal birds and beasts took up their round of noise. The moon came mounting swiftly above a distant fringe of towering palms, flooding the undulating surface of the matted and tangled jungle with a brilliant, mellow glow which barely trickled to earth about our *tambo,* or camp, so dense was the foliage above.

Night—but not still! A continuous rustling in the jungle—a continuous slashing in the river. Now and then a rotted, creeper-strangled branch, gnawed through and through by insects, crashed to earth. Down near the water a great tropical owl shrieked and moaned and there was a flutter of strong wings from restless parrots in the palm fronds, the squeak and clatter of nighttime animals on the dank earth and many unexplainable sounds. Once it was as as though a distant bell was ringing—the measured beating of a hollow drum—and again a piercing, unearthly shriek of death.

"But what have the wild Mangeromas to do with the high price you are asking for your rubber?" I questioned in my best Portuguese as I watched Joao in his fire-lit hammock deftly rolling another cigarette.

"It is true, *senhor,* that I am asking of you foreign rubber buyers a high price," answered Joao, quite unperturbed, "but you must not forget that every hundred *kilogramo* of *caoutchouc* I have stored in my *defumador* has already cost me many pieces of gold—and at least one human life."

"Even so, *senhor,* but have I not also heard that human life is cheapest along the Amazon?"

"Each year a world on wheels demands more rubber," he continued in his mellow Portuguese as he lolled in his hammock and smoked. "Each year we *seringales* must push farther and farther into the jungle to supply this demand. And for this daring we must pay the blood tax of the Amazon. Only the wild savages of the jungle can live permanently in this great tropical morass, immune to its deadly fevers, fearless of poisonous reptiles and dangerous beasts. That is why we raid the villages of the wild Mangeromas for our laborers, *senhor,* and why this rubber is so very costly.

"Look you, *amigo,* last season when the great waters came up I sent my man Pedro, one of the best *seringueiros* in all Brazil, and ten Peruvian *caboclos* up the Rio das Branco to look for new rubber fields. This expedition cost me many thousands in gold —I shall tell you how much of this precious *caoutchouc* Pedro brought back!"

About the little iron tables, pushing out into the cool street shadows before every café in Para, in the *posadas* of smaller towns up-river, in the scattered rubber camps at the edge of the jungle, a stranger hears of incredible adventures which are commonplace enough along the murky waters of the world's largest river.

Joao da Calvero, oldest of Amazon *seringales,* long since has written his adventures in the "Book of Life." So I will let him tell of Pedro in his own inimical way and concern myself only with the more difficult task of putting his softly flowing words into American.

Pedro and his ten brave *caboclos* paddled away on the flood from this very station into the unknown jungle, their long canoes heavy with supplies; Pedro and ten as brave *caboclos* as ever sliced a tree. After many weary days over rapids and waterfalls, into the small and unknown streams, they found a veritable forest of rubber trees far up one of the branches of the Rio das Branco. They hauled the canoes out on the bank and penetrated into the rubber forest, where they cleared a space and built a large camp with a small *tambo* for Pedro and large *barracaos* for the Peruvian rubber workers. Then the men cut many *estradas,* or paths, through the dense forest of great ferns and clinging vines until they had in sight more than two thousand fine rubber trees. There was a huge fortune to be had for the taking, but Pedro knew that he could not hope to get it all without more laborers. Workmen are hard to get in this Amazon jungle—and harder still to keep. Pedro has but one fault—he was always too greedy. He should have set about gathering what rubber he could, but instead of cutting down the trees and bleeding them, he sent his men scouting in the jungle for more help, and it was not long before they located a small village of the wild Mangeromas.

The next night Pedro made his raid.

Now these Mangeromas are the wildest of all the Amazon savages—they are all devils —they know not fear nor death. They resort to every cunning to keep the Peruvian rubber hunters away from their villages. Living as they do in the wildest unexplored sections of the country, they manage to hide their villages well, protecting them from chance invaders by poisoning the streams, setting spring guns of their own cunning manufacture and by digging secret pitfalls. But Pedro was well versed in these tricks, and in the darkness of night, when all the savages were carefully housed in their great *maloca,* or communal dwelling, he led his men with lighted torches to the village.

This *maloca* was built of poles and palm leaves and was fully forty feet high and perhaps two hundred feet in diameter. It stood in the center of a small clearing. There was but one door to this great building where slept more than two hundred savages, and it was fastened by thongs. Pedro himself cut the fastenings of this door with his *machete* and pushed it back. Instantly his men fired a volley of rifle shots into the building and charged inside, shooting and shouting.

"Hoi Hai! Hoi! Hai!" yelled the charging *caboclos.*

It was answered by the guttural cries of the startled savages as they fumbled in the darkness for their bows and spears.

It was not a fight—it was a stampede, a raid and a flight. Before the surprised

Mangeromas could tell friend from foe Pedro and his men had knocked down and seized upon eight Indians and three young women. These they quickly tied hand and foot and carried away into the jungle. They did not tarry after the purpose of their raid was secure, but made all speed to their canoes and hastily embarked. When morning came they were far from the Mangeroma village and any possible pursuit.

The next morning but one the captured Mangeroma braves were led out and chained two and two. They were fine-looking savages, tall and muscular and of a very light bronze color. They were almost naked, with bright feathers in their straight black hair. When they were lined up in front of the *barracaos* they were addressed by Pedro, who alone speaks something of their difficult tongue.

"Men of the Great Forest," began Pedro, "we have brought you here to work among the rubber trees. If you will work hard and do just as you are told you will be well treated and have plenty to eat. When the task is done you will be set free and your reward will be great."

When the task is done! Mother of God! Pedro did but jest, *senhor,* for this rubber work is never done.

Those savages are all sullen dogs. They are fit only for extermination. They stood there with hard faces, straining at their bonds and said never a word.

"Answer!" thundered Pedro.

When they made no reply, but looked at him steadily with narrowed eyes, Pedro motioned to a Peruvian *caboclo* to come with the whip. At the first switch of the heavy lash the youngest one among them stepped out of the line and spoke.

"Why have you killed our people and carried us away?" he asked insolently.

"Because the world needs more rubber and we must have more men," snarled Pedro.

"We know nothing about this work."

"*Deus!*" laughed Pedro. "But you shall learn! My *caboclos* are most excellent teachers."

Then did this naked savage thump his painted chest with his manacled fists and shout:

"I am Bi-to-ya, the son of a chief, and I will not cut the rubber trees, neither will I carry your loads nor paddle your canoes."

Pedro stood aghast before such brazen insolence. He was dumfounded. Then he bellowed with rage and with his fist struck the savage beast to the ground. In a thrice the young braggart was suspended by the thumbs and the whistling lash was marking his naked back. They laid on the whip well, but this savage made no sound. When he had received some fifty lashes Pedro asked him again if he would work. The answer was an insulting laugh and a taunt to go on with the beating. Pedro, wild with rage, seized the whip and struck the man senseless with its heavy butt.

When those other savages saw what their chief had done they cried out in one voice that they would not work in the rubber, nor did the lash show them the folly of their obstinacy. But we have other remedies for such laziness. Pedro chained them one and all to the mahogany trees, with their feet and legs in wooden stocks, and ordered them left without food until they should be starved to the work.

There were three young women, as I have said, and two of these the *caboclos* passed from one to another, as was their pleasure, or they won and lost them at cards. There was, however, one among these savage women, a little naked bronze maid of the jungle, and she was a regular she-jaguar. The men could do nothing with her, and when Pedro attempted to talk to her of love in her own tongue she struck him in the face with a stick and laid a deep gash in his head.

Pedro ran from his *tambo* shrieking curses, the red blood dripping from his rage-contorted face. His cries brought up the men from their gambling and they quickly caught this devil-woman and threw her down on the earth near her people who were chained to the mahogany trees. But for the *caboclos*, who greatly prize these savage women, Pedro would have killed her then and there with his *machete*. But they thrust him aside, and two men held the struggling little bronze figure face down upon the earth while another stepped forward with the whip. No one was looking at

the young chief; they did not see that his hands were knotted in the wooden stocks, that his savage face was twisted with rage. With the first blow of the whip he cried out as though the leather had cut his own bronze skin, though the woman made no sound.

"Dog, hold thy tongue!" cried he with the whip, preparing for another blow.

"Stop!" cried the young chief.

"Beat the devil out of her!" cried Pedro. "Flog the fiend until she whimpers for mercy at my feet."

"Hold!" commanded the savage. "I, though a chief by birth, will work in your rubber if you will let the maid go."

It came to Pedro in a flash, and he waved aside the *caboclo* and his whip. Much as he panted for revenge for his hurt, he remembered that I had sent him to collect rubber and he had more need for laborers than for stubborn women.

"And your men?" cried Pedro greedily.

"My men will also work in your rubber," answered the young chief, "if you will not beat the maid and will let her go her way."

Here, thought Pedro, was a way to manage those wild Mangeromas who had no fear of the lash and laughed at starvation. Here was a way to get this fortune in rubber. He would hold the young woman as a hostage and through her he would harvest this great forest of rubber, after that—ah!

"And I will show you where there are many more rubber trees," promised the savage.

"They are too far away," answered Pedro.

"Rubber is never too far away for a good *seringueiro*."

"Very well," agreed Pedro, much elated, "if you and your men will work in the rubber the maid will not be beaten, but I shall guard her faithfully until the work is done."

"And when the work is done she shall go with us to our village?" bargained the chief.

"And when the work is done she shall go with you," answered Pedro, winking slyly at his men.

And with this agreement the young woman was taken back to Pedro's *tambo* and placed under guard. Those wild men were released from the stocks and fed and soon thereafter, chained two and two, they were sent into the rubber forest to harvest the precious *caoutchouc*. There was no time to tap so many trees. Instead the *caboclos* cut them down with their *machetes* and the Indians were taught to gash the trunks so that the trees would bleed upon the ground where the milk coagulated into cakes. These cakes were collected each day and stored at the *defumadore*, where the rubber is smoked and cured.

Had Pedro lived up to his bargain with the Mangeromas in all probability I would not be tiring you with this story, *senhor*. Those savages worked well and faithful, chained as they were, two and two, so they could not run away into the jungle. But Pedro could not leave alone his fair hostage—this little naked bronze woman of the jungle.

One night there came from Pedro's *tambo* a plaintive, half smothered scream, followed by gruff curses and the sobbing of a woman. The wild men sprang up in their chains in answer to the call, beat down the guard and rushed to the rescue. Unarmed and heavily chained as they were, they were powerless. The cries of the guard brought the rubber workers streaming from their *barracaos*, rifles in hand, and they poured a volley of bullets into the rioters. But for the darkness they would have killed them all, and as it was, two were killed and three others wounded.

One of those killed was an old man who had been fastened to the leg of the young chief by a length of chain. It was necessary to cut away this dead body so that it might be thrown to the vultures, and when this was done the young chief, with bowed head, gathered up the length of chain and stepped back to his place in the *barracao*. He was very cunning, was this chief, and the men being more or less excited over the riot neglected for one little minute to fasten him to the mahogany tree, and when they remembered, it was too late. This savage had disappeared into the darkness—chain and all.

Instantly there was a great hue and cry. Pedro ran about cursing them one and all, forgetting that he was the cause of the

riot, and even while he was stamping and cursing this savage very boldly stepped from the jungle into the shadow of Pedro's *tambo,* forced an entrance, and freed his savage woman. The men saw a flash of brown bodies disappearing into the darkness of the forest and sent a volley of rifle bullets in pursuit, but without result.

That next day there was no working at the rubber. Instead, Pedro sent his *caboclos* scouring the jungle for the runaways. They knew that the young chief was hampered with many pounds of heavy iron chain, and that he had no weapons, so they thought they could easily find him. But he was far more cunning than they knew. He wound the chain with grass so it would not clank as he walked, and hid his trail so cleverly that not even a jaguar could find it.

It was not until the end of the second day that the men came upon any evidence of the runaways. Then one of them found the heavy iron chain beside a small stream. They discovered where the man and woman had laid securely hidden while they worked at the iron leg band with a rough stone. The job must have been long and tedious, but in the end the shackle was worn through and the young chief was free.

With those savages loose there was only one thing for Pedro to do. He should have hastily packed up his rubber, marched to the river and embarked for home before the Mangeromas, hot for revenge, came to exterminate them. But Pedro could not decide to leave the rubber. He reasoned that without weapons the young chief would starve in the jungle and his hunters had reported that the raided *maloca* was burned and abandoned. He must have a few more days at the rich harvest! Never did *machetes* ply more quickly, and the forest fairly echoed with the falling rubber trees. The remaining savages were beaten with sticks to make work the faster, and the two women were set to work carrying the gum to the *defumadores.*

Bi-to-ya, and his savage woman, once free from the chain, slipped through the forest as easily as monkeys, and hurried back to their village. When they reached there the *maloca* was in ashes and the tribe had hidden away in the far jungle. It would be days and days before they might find their comrades, and by that time it would be too late to rescue their captured tribesmen.

This young chief was a *diabo,* like all the rest of the Mangeromas. He knew not fear and his red heart burned for savage vengeance because of Pedro's blow. And—I speak from a thorough knowledge of their customs—it was thus he planned his murderous business:

In the ruins of the *maloca* he found an earthen pot and set about brewing a devil's broth. From a peculiar vine growing beside the creek he collected a handful of bark. A bush yielded certain purple berries. From the jungle he brought the fat roots of another plant. These he crushed to pulp and set simmering over a fire, adding a handful of brown beetles to complete the charm. While the woman tended this pot he set about making himself a weapon to combat with the repeating rifles. From the bank of the stream he plucked a tall reed and with a stone knife cut off a length of about ten feet, thus making a long, slender, hollow tube.

This tube was too light and brittle to handle, so he cunningly provided it with a strong cover by hollowing out a bamboo of the same length, then slipped the tube inside. This kept the tube straight and guarded it against breakage. Next he fashioned a mouthpiece from a section of a wild gourd and his wonderful blow-gun was complete and ready for its victims. Then he made from the leaf stems of a palm a bundle of little thin arrows, each about ten inches long. These he sharpened and notched at one end and fitted with a tuft of wild cotton, so that it would fit the tube of his blow-gun.

By the time this work was done the contents of the pot had simmered down to a thick brown sirup, and into it this savage devil dipped the notched tips of his little arrows.

As I said, Pedro was driving his men with all speed, fearing that the wild Mangeromas would arrive any day. Give them credit, *senhor,* for being very brave, for those men did not fear the savages. Those

caboclos of the jungle really like to fight. They were armed with repeating rifles and had plenty of ammunition, so they did not hasten away. Guards were stationed about the workers, rifles ready for action. Only a few hours remained to carry the rubber down to the river and embark for civilizaon.

Weighted with rubber the workers were staggering down the trail when one of them stumbled and fell with his load. Fretting at any delay the guard kicked the savage to his feet and struck him in the back with the stock of his rifle to urge him on. He had raised the gun to strike again when there came a peculiar whir, like the swift flight of some strange insect—and the gun fell to the earth instead.

"*Deus!*" cried the guard hoarsely.

He seized his left arm tightly near the bicep and stood petrified, his eyes staring out of their sockets at a splinter, no larger than a knitting needle, which was sticking in his brown arm just below the elbow, a tiny ball of wild cotton fluttering from its tip.

"*Deus!*" he cried again, and snatched the tiny arrow from his flesh.

"The Mangeromas!" cried another guard, firing his rifle into the jungle. "The cannibals!"

Others came running, thinking that the savages were upon them, and they fired several volleys into the jungle. With a revolver in either hand Pedro led his men on a wild charge into that thick wall of matted vegetation, but there were no Mangeromas to come yelling, swinging their long war clubs and brandishing their three-tinted spears. The jungle was strangely quiet.

It was all very peculiar. No more little arrows came whirring from out of nowhere and they went back to their stricken comrade, who seemed to be sleeping with his shoulders against a rubber tree. They tried to arouse him, but the brave fellow was quite dead.

The rubber carrying ceased at once and the men retreated toward their *barracaos*, and as they went, every moving thing in the dense jungle about the *estradas* was showered with rifle bullets. Just as they neared the camp, and the danger seemed past, came another flittering arrow and fastened itself in the thick of a man's leg.

"The cannibals!" shrieked the fellow, and fired his rifle.

Once more the jungle was torn with bullets and once more the men returned, panting for breath, without having seen a single Mangeroma. With every human effort they tried to save that rubber worker's life. They gashed the tiny wound until it bled freely and they burned it with flashing powder—but he died just as they carried him into camp.

Those *carboclos* were all brave men. Wild with rage they beat up and down the jungle, shouting for the cowardly Mangeromas to come out and fight like men, but the only answer was a shriek of wild, eerie laughter which seemed to come from afar.

"It is the spirit of death!" cried one superstitious fellow. "It is not of the flesh."

"But the poison arrows are most real," cursed Pedro. "I tell you the savages have us surrounded."

"But this is not the way the Mangeromas fight," said one old rubber hunter. "They like to come to close quarters with their long war clubs and their three-tinted spears. I have fought them many times, and I know."

"It is the spirit of death—" began the first speaker.

"Shut up!" cursed Pedro. "It is the Mangeromas, and when we close with them we will glut our vengeance to the full."

But they did not close with the wild Mangeromas and the night passed without incident. Early next morning the men made still greater haste to get away from that devil-infested jungle. While the carrying of the rubber was in progress came another singing arrow, speeding its poisonous death, and again there could be found no Mangeromas. Filled with superstitious fear those frightened *caboclos* loaded their captives with rubber, shouldered what remained, and hurried away to the river and safety.

They had gone but a little way when another rubber worker laid down his load to pluck a tiny arrow from his neck. This

time the men did not stop to hunt the jungle, but contented themselves with a hasty volley into the brush and hurried on their way.

One by one those brave fellows dropped out of the mad race until their trail was marked with dead men. As fast as the captives fell, exhausted under their loads, Pedro had them shot, abandoning the precious rubber where it fell. Now those *caboclos* were powerful men, and they raced through the jungle like wild beasts, throwing away their loads, their rifles and everything else that they might speed the faster, but ever about them hung the invisible spirit of vengeance with the blowgun and the little poisoned arrows—and every little while they heard that eerie laughter far out in the tangled green.

At last there was but one man left, and that one was Pedro. His clothing was whipped to threads and he was gaunt from fatigue and a deadly fever burned like fire in his veins, but still he ran on toward the safety of the river, praying that the canoes might be there. Twice as he ran he heard that peculiar whir—like the rapid flight of some strange insect, but each time, by the grace of God, death passed him by a hair's breadth.

Staggering, falling, panting for breath and life, he alone reached the river, as I have said. With all haste he dragged a canoe to the water and pushed out into the current. Summoning all his strength he seized a paddle and drove the canoe far out into the middle of the stream, and then sank exhausted in the bottom of the boat.

He was none too soon, *senhor,* for even as he collapsed came a little arrow, skittering over the surface of the water, and stopped within a foot of the canoe. He was just out of range. At the sight of this arrow Pedro broke out into horrible laughter. Struggling to his feet he waved his bloody arms at the shore and cursed. And, as he cursed, came two brown figures, a stalwart bronze Mangeroma and a little naked woman, and the savage shook his blowgun at Pedro in the drifting canoe and shouted with rage.

He staggered into this very room, did my man Pedro, thin and gaunt, shaking with fear and fever, and dropped all but lifeless into that very chair.

"Where is the rubber?" I asked eagerly.

"The Mangeromas," he whispered hoarsely. "The *caboclos* are all dead—the Spirit of the Forest."

"But the rubber!" I thundered, for what matters a few men? "Where is it?"

For answer Pedro broke out like a man crazed in the head, laughing like a foolish macaw.

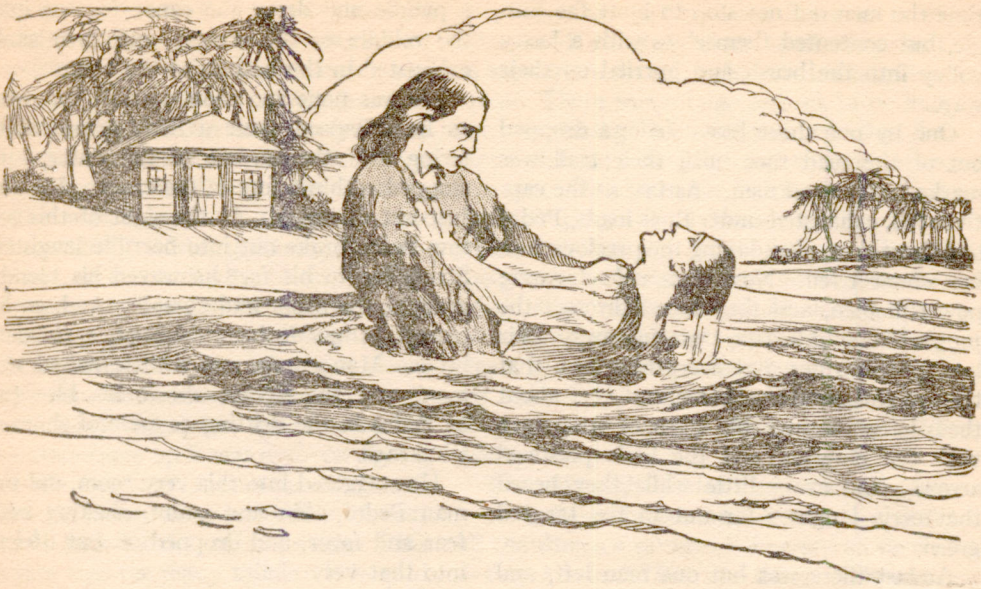
"Rubber!" he shrieked. "Rubber—this is what the expedition brings!"

Still laughing in this wild way he reached inside his tattered shirt and flung down upon the table a little pancake of rubber weighing perhaps a pound.

THE REDWOODS

TALL, somber spires in majesty that rise
Above the greener verdure spread below,
When through their tops the soft breathed zephyrs blow
With echoing voice each waving branch replies
To their vague whispers and mysterious sighs;
And when the wind in faint, sweet languor dies
A silence, like a spirit, seems to steal
Through the dim aisles, and I within me feel
An awe, as if all reverent I stood
In some deserted church, not in a wood,
For God seems nearer in this quiet shade
Than in the structures that man's hand has made.

Thomas Grant Springer.



Red Darkness

By GEORGE F. WORTS

CHAPTER XIV.

BETWEEN US THIEVES.

A LESS experienced crook than Javalie would have gone to pieces. His activities within the next five seconds proved him to be a young man of coolness and resource. He pushed the steel door shut and spun the combinations. He propelled the trembling banker into the bedroom, and kicked the walnut door shut. He guided Mr. Banning swiftly into the chair he had been occupying; then he stilled the shrieking bell on the clock, and saw that the levers on the other clocks were turned to "Silent."

He was trembling and gray. Great drops of moisture stood out on his forehead. He was demoralized—scared as he had never been scared in his life. But his grip on the situation did not for an instant relax.

"You are sleeping—sleeping deeply," he choked out.

But the spell was broken. Mr. Banning blinked his eyes several times; the expression in them changed to one of blankness. He stared at Javalie incomprehensively.

"Well, I'll be switched," he grumbled. "How long have I been drowsing here, my boy?"

Javalie summoned his most beatific smile. "You only dozed off a moment ago, my friend."

"How pale you look, lad! You'd better be getting to bed, hadn't you? H-m. That's right. I forgot you don't use a bed. Curl up here on the floor if you'd like to. I'm kind of—sleepy—myself." He yawned luxuriously. "Shall we go on with this, say, in the morning?"

He groaned. "Oh, dear. My boy, why

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 18.

do my children hate their old father so? I wonder if Nan knows how she hurts me? I wonder if Teddy knows that he is killing his father? All I want is a *little* consideration from them. I'm a lonely old man. I—I can't let them go away from me. Oh-hum!

"When they were little I used to say to myself: 'Won't we have great times when you grow up and I've made enough to give us all everything we want!' They were mighty nice—little—kids. What do you suppose has changed them? They—hate me."

His voice tapered off to another groan, half sigh, half yawn. His mouth twisted and sagged.

"Peace—peace," Javalie soothed him.

The banker settled deeper into the chair, wet his lips, and mumbled deep in his throat.

"Sleep, sleep," Javalie crooned. "Think of nothing but that you are weary, tired, fatigued. Your head is heavy. You feel tired all over. Your arms go to sleep. Your legs grow tired. A feeling of heaviness and a desire for deep, deep sleep has taken possession of your whole body. Sleep is so sweet.

"Your head feels duller; your thoughts grow more and more confused. Sleep deeply, deeply, deeply. No sound, no excitement, can waken you. You can hear nothing, feel nothing. Mr. Banning!" he called.

Mr. Banning's head fell forward; he was breathing audibly, heavily through his lips, each puff blowing them out from his teeth.

Javalie said feelingly: "Damn that clock!"

A ghostly glow lighted up the battery of windows. The house was still, heavy with perfect silence, into which crept the never-ending mumbling of the ocean, the faint pattering of dew dripping from the tile eaves to the ground.

Javalie hastened into the alcove with the slip of pale-green paper crumpled in one hand.

He smoothed out the wrinkles against the satiny gray steel, twisted one combination after another with practiced fingers.

He paused and spun about.

He had distinctly heard the faint click of a closing door. He stuffed the paper into his sleeve and leaped to the water cooler. He was drinking calmly when Pete Reynolds stepped into the doorway. Pete Reynolds had apparently only recently emerged from his bath.

A black dressing gown covered his pyjamas. His skin glowed; his thinning light-brown hair sparkled with moisture, and his scalp was pink. One of his hands was thrust into a deep corded pocket. His mouth slowly twisted into a knowing grin; his chest and shoulders trembled with silent laughter. His eyes glittered.

"Uhuh," he drawled; "just about where I had an idea I'd find you. Been looking all over the plant for you. You don't waste time, do you?"

"My friend—" Javalie began in his benevolent tones.

"Agh, can that religious stuff!" Reynolds cut him off with a snarl. "Do you think I am not wise to you? Why, I got your number when you came in, and I got you cold when you pulled that card trick on Tillman. It was a nice extemporaneous little trick. Your brain never sleeps—I'll say it doesn't!

"Oh, of course," he added sarcastically, "you didn't know that every one of those cards were marked by that sneaking little Vincent Tanner. Well, what have you got to say?"

Javalie's smile came slowly. It suggested daggers sliding through the dark. "Go on," he said patiently.

"The low-down," Reynolds informed him, "is this: if you don't consent to work with me on this I'll queer you. Now, will you talk American?"

"Not here," said Javalie. "Come to my room."

Reynolds backed out of the doorway, with his right hand still thrust deep in his pocket and his eyes fixed unwaveringly on Javalie's mouth.

Javalie closed the door and walked the length of the bedroom with Reynolds close behind him.

At the door Reynolds stopped and looked back at the snoring banker.

"Doped?"

Javalie shook his head. "He isn't going to wake up."

In Javalie's room, Reynolds turned the key in the lock and retained it.

"Sit down."

Javalie lowered himself into a chair and folded his hands loosely behind his head. The expression on his slender, lean face had become almost dreamy.

Reynolds, having locked the door, strode over and stood looking down at him with a scornful grin.

"Now, holy man," he said gently, "see if you can read my thoughts."

"Wouldn't you rather play leap-frog?" Javalie replied.

"I mean it. Go on and dope me. You've got about one guess. Go on and guess it."

"You are almost as difficult to penetrate," Javalie replied, "as the meaning of a twenty-four-sheet poster. You are wondering how you can rush me into a fifty-fifty split. You don't know how. I'll tell you something more, Reynolds. You're yellow, and you're a rank amateur. I wouldn't be surprised but what you are cutting your eye-teeth on this job. Shall I go on?"

"Oh, wonderful!" Reynolds chortled. "Perfectly uncanny! What a mind reader you are, holy one! No, that's enough. We'll let it go at that. I'm not here to quarrel. I'm a business man. I've got something to sell. I've got the combination to that vault—and you haven't! I know you're laying your foundations to stay in this house a good long time; but wouldn't it suit you better, really now, to have some one give it to you—and get done in a hurry? Good as you are, it will take you weeks to work out that combination.

"Oh, hell, I know you're a clever crook! I'll wager there isn't a smoother one in the whole country. Everything you do shows *that*. You have the master's touch. I admit it. With you in fair competition I haven't a chance. But the competition isn't fair—unfortunately for you—because I know the combination of that vault, *and you don't!*

"You hit the nail on the head when you mentioned a fifty-fifty split. Make that a promise, and I'll obey commands. Whatever you say, I'll do. I know a master's voice when I hear one, and I know that the word of a high-class crook like you is good."

"Thank you," said Javalie dryly.

"Well, what's your answer?"

Javalie lifted the heel of one sandaled foot to the toe of the other. This formation he proceeded to wave slowly back and forth, the while contemplating it critically. "In the first place," he said regretfully, "I have made it a rule never to team. To tell you the truth, Reynolds, I don't need you."

Reynolds nodded curtly. "Suit yourself. What is your proposition?"

Javalie reflected. "One-fifth of the plunder."

"Oh, hell. Are you trying to make me laugh out loud?"

"One-fifth," Javalie repeated, "conditional upon my being left strictly alone." He contemplated the flushed face critically. "Otherwise, nothing."

"And what if a piking fifth doesn't satisfy me?"

"Before I'm through it will more than satisfy you."

"Is that a threat?"

"No; merely a statement of fact. Let me try to show you my side of it, Reynolds. You have been in this house more than a month. All this time you have been skating on the thinnest ice. You are in danger of being asked to leave—"

"Thanks to your good work!"

Javalie slowly shook his head.

"Nope; you've brought it on yourself. I haven't said a word against you. I didn't have to. Why, you haven't been a bit clever. Look here. Why did you try to force your way into Mme. Jeanne's room one night when her husband was away?"

The amateur glared at him. "Who told you that?"

"I didn't dream it, did I? You've been unpardonably crude. You're a bungler. What I'm trying to figure out is, *what* was your idea in wanting to run off with Miss Banning? What *was* your idea, Reynolds?"

"It's none of your damned business!"

"Why isn't it? You say you want to team up with me. Before I would team up with any one I would want to know just how his brain worked."

"Maybe I love the girl!" Reynolds blurted angrily.

Javalie waved a disparaging hand.

"That's the most absurd remark you've made yet—if it's true."

"Well—protection during my get-away, if you must have a reason!"

"I guessed that. And you *do* love the girl, don't you? Well, you have proved conclusively that you don't know your subject, your subject being Theodore P. Banning."

"All right," the amateur growled; "supposing you're right; supposing I have made some mistakes. Get down to brass tacks."

"You picked to-night," Javalie proceeded. "You knew the old man would be sleeping much more soundly than usual. That wasn't bad reasoning, really. But to spoil it all, you were planning to run off with the girl this morning. Oh, Lord!"

Reynolds glared at him. "She said you had persuaded her not to do it. You're so damned penetrating, I suppose you were wise to my game!"

Javalie ignored this. "What I am trying to get at, Reynolds, is your mental processes. You don't seem to *realize* how important they are in an affair of this kind. Why, I studied up on Theodore P. Banning for six months before I even got around to considering methods.

"On jobs of such magnitude, Reynolds, preparation is ninety-nine per cent and a big fraction. I've prepared for this for a solid year and a half. I prepared for every contingency, including you. I waited purposely for this very night. The one flaw in my technique so far was that card trick. I hadn't anticipated Fortune K. Tillman. And if you hadn't come butting in when you did, the job, from start to finish, would have taken me less than ten hours. You're simply a natural-born bungler."

"We can finish it now!" Reynolds cried.

Javalie waved the suggestion languidly aside.

"Too late. The servants will be up and doing in another few minutes—if they aren't already. Oh, there's really no great hurry. What I was getting at was this: I want no interference from you. Between now and when I do the trick, don't talk. Play the game as you have been playing it, and—leave everything to me. Don't question or wonder at anything I do. I'll do some queer things. Continue with the attitude toward me that you've adopted; be skeptical—but not too skeptical. And—you will get one-fifth of the plunder."

Reynolds grinned slyly.

"And how, if I may be so bold to ask, are you going to get into the vault? Do you think I am going to give you the combination, give up the chance to take the whole pile, for a stinking twenty per cent?"

Javalie sprang up suddenly, unexpectedly; and as he did so Pete Reynolds's hand leaped from the corded pocket with a short, wickedly glittering pistol.

"Don't pull any rough stuff on me!" he grated.

Javalie stared at him for a moment incredulously.

"Why, what's the idea?"

"You're going to come clean!"

"Put that silly thing away," Javalie said irritably. "Of course I am going to come clean. Do you think I have been in this house all evening without having the combination, you bungling idiot?"

He jerked the crumpled paper from his sleeve, folded it across the middle, so that the combination of the upper dial was exposed.

"Here it is."

Reynolds's eyes were bulging. He gasped. "Where in hell did you get that?"

"I've got it," Javalie answered. "Now, put that popgun away and go to your bed. Somewhere between now and ten o'clock I have got to get some sleep and prepare a sermon."

"A *sermon!*" the amateur blurted.

"I've promised to deliver a sermon in the colored Baptist Church at ten; yes." He started for the door; turned back. "I nearly forgot. Is twenty per cent on the dollar satisfactory—after thinking it over?"

"My God!" Reynolds muttered. "You! A sermon!" He stared at Javalie a moment longer, then burst into laughter. "You *are* good. If I had your brains I'd be a millionaire. A sermon. Well, I'll say I *am* an amateur! A piker's fifth is more than I deserve. Sure. I'm on. Will you shake on it?"

"No," Javalie said coldly. "But you have my word. You'll go as quietly as possible, of course."

"Why won't you shake my hand?"

"Because I dislike you. Kindly unlock my door."

Reynolds snorted.

"Go to hell, then. When are you going to—pull it?"

"Within twenty-four hours. Now, good night."

Reynolds unlocked the door and went. When the door was closed again Javalie went to the window, knelt down and propped his elbows on the sill. The presence of a competitor he had, as he had told Reynolds, anticipated. He had, however, expected to find him among the servants. Such a tempting cache would naturally draw crooks as a chunk of bad meat draws flies. Reynolds did not worry him, but he hoped there were no more.

He gazed with sleepless eyes at the eastern horizon. The sun had not yet risen, but it threatened to do so at any moment. It was a lovely morning, fragrant with flowers, cool, colored with a gold brush. Below him the garden gleamed through the mist like green water through foam. The wind had fallen, and the Atlantic was hazy and palely blue—more like a streak of flat color on a canvas than a limitless expanse of water.

The night sky was the color of Nanette Banning's eyes, a deeper blue than the sea, and in the east, piled with turrets and battlements of clouds, were billowing opaque masses of honey and old rose.

Javalie, sighing luxuriously, wondered why the soft night sky had reminded him of Nanette Banning's bold blue eyes. Being analytical, he pursued the inquiry back to its lair. She had a way of strolling uninvited into his thoughts, and sitting there, smiling sweetly, demanding attention, admiration—what she would call "service." She deserved all this, to be sure. And of course she knew she deserved it. She knew, without being told, that her soft silk hair was endeared to any man with a discerning eye by the riffles of gold in it; that her patrician nose, her beautiful mouth and chin, her fashionable slimness, were, individually and collectively, worthy of any man's honest adoration. Her lawlessness made her rather singular. She was a delicious capture—with claws—for some lucky fool of a millionaire.

For a moment Javalie permitted himself to be sad. The futility of his own particular form of self-expression sometimes bothered him.

This occasional awareness of a sense of his social unfitness, his moral delinquency, took the place of what, in upright people, is called conscience. It did not bother him very often. It did not bother him long now.

His life force sprang from other principles entirely; he was concerned primarily with artistry. Life and nature were expressed to him in terms of art. He saw all life as pictures, drab or gay, alive or still, complete or incomplete, well done or botched. . . .

Why had she spoiled an otherwise wonderful kiss by laughing? He could, however, have repeated the climax in the garden—seriously. She wouldn't have laughed then. No; things had progressed beautifully in the garden. And she unquestionably, if perhaps unconsciously, wanted to be loved seriously. Was she not, in this house of antipathy, starving for love? Well, then, why hadn't he—

It had been, he realized, a psychological moment. She was planning to run off with Pete Reynolds—that insufferable ass! Did she realize what an ass he was? No doubt she was blinded by her need. Poor girl! Why was it, he wondered, that beautiful, clever women—not that she was conspicuously clever—were so often deluded into acquiring the most obvious misfits? Here was a plausible reason. Poor girl!

He came together with a jerk. This would never do. What had become of his enviable calculating detachment? He was permitting

a woman to divert his mind from the biggest job he had ever tackled—a spoiled, self-centered creature.

"Hell's bells!" growled Javalie.

The sun climbed up out of the ocean like a toy balloon—or a light on the mast of a ship.

He turned from the window and looked longingly at the bed; then, much less longingly, at the Chinese prayer rug beside him. With a baffled sigh he settled down on the rug and stretched out flat on his back.

CHAPTER XV.

BRIMSTONE, MILK, AND HONEY.

DAN MARTIN was standing over him with a glistening silver tray when Javalie, only a minute or two later, it seemed, awoke. The sun was shining hotly on his face. A scarlet tanager shot past the window like a passionate thought. A mockingbird in a camphor tree began patiently to practice the call of a bobwhite. The colored butler recalled him to a sense of his responsibilities.

Javalie stood up with his face to the sun and stretched out his arms. His lips moved silently, as if he were saying a prayer. The Rev. Dan Martin continued to stare at him with the profoundest respect and approval, and, one might almost say, with envy.

"Yo' breakfast, holy man," he murmured tremulously when Javalie had done with his mute address to the mid-morning sun. "I been in heah, suh, three or fo' times dis mawnin', but you was sound asleep. It's pas' ten now, suh. You 'member, you promise las' night to preach dis mawnin', suh."

"And I had not forgotten, my brother," Javalie reassured him with a smile.

He was ravenously hungry. He would have enjoyed sitting down to scrambled eggs, a thick, pink slice of ham mellowly browned, a pot of coffee, and rich cream, a platter of waffles deliciously crisp and golden, and maple syrup from Maine. The silver tray bore one Florida orange, one Oregon apple, and a comb of Ohio honey. What a blessing is rapid, refrigerated transportation!

Javalie lifted his eyes, and again his lips moved in silent prayer. Dan Martin supported the tray while Javalie peeled and ate the orange. He ate it with relish. It was an Indian River orange, solid juice. Oranges were rich, he understood in vitamine-A. He hoped that vitamine-A would diminish that painful gnawing in his stomach.

"De Good Book say, 'Man shall not live bah bread alone,'" Dan Martin murmured. "St. John de Baptist lived on locusts and honey. Seems to me lak you favor St. John, holy man; de sackcloth, de sandals, de honey and all."

"St. John the Baptist," Javalie corrected him severely, "wore camel's hair and a girdle of skin. You must be thinking of Hezekiah."

"Yassuh, holy man, da's right—Hezekiah."

Javalie slowly masticated a walnut, then dug into the honeycomb with a grapefruit spoon.

"Holy man, c'n I ask you a simple question? I wants to know, does you preach from de Good Book or f'm yo' life?"

"Both," Javalie replied. "Have you your Bible?"

"Yassuh."

Dan put the tray down and produced from his hip pocket a worn and glossy Bible. Javalie thumbed through it to Isaiah. He knew the Bible well. A thorough study of it had been deemed a necessary part of his preparation.

"My text this morning will be taken from the first verse, thirty-seventh chapter of Isaiah. And I will call your sinning brethren from the darkness of iniquity into the white and blazing light. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee!"

"Aye, Lawd!"

Javalie's deep-set blue eyes were blazing fanatically; his skin was flushed. Whether he consciously realized himself to be the vilest of hypocrites or not it would not be easy to say. To Javalie, a rôle was a rôle. He played his parts with the zeal of genuine sincerity; he was an artist to his fingertips. Having agreed to deliver a sermon in

a colored church, he naturally turned to the magnificent and stormy passages of Isaiah for assistance.

"Let us go, my brother, to the temple of your people." He started for the door, stopped, and returned. "Ah! I was to go only on condition that the girl of the gaming table, the fallen Jazzabelle, attended the services. Will she be there?"

Dan Martin was smiling beatifically, nodding. In the presence of religious fervor a negro is never at a loss. To him religion is much more than mere religion; it is a Heaven-sent opportunity to relieve himself of pent-up racial emotions. His reactions are tumultuous, eruptive and as rhythmic as a Nigerian war drum.

It was a perfect Sunday morning. Without a calendar or a memory, you would have known that it was Sunday. Something in the air said so. The sun shone warmly on the sand dunes and palms out of a flawless topaz sky.

A soft wind from the Gulf Stream blew through the trees and rustled the stiff palmettos and bunch grass. An odor of orange blossoms came and went. The air was languorous and as dry as the South Pacific trades.

A musical clanging reached them as they crossed the Florida East Coast tracks; and as they neared the camp Javalie discovered a colored boy in the act of banging away at a heavy wagon tire suspended by chains from a gallows.

Services, as Dan Martin had informed him, were already under way. The clanging tire was a last call to the lingerers. The church was some distance away from the shanties and the juke. From its doorway the sticky, besmoked form of the still was discernible through the trees. The church was an airy structure with canvas side walls and a roof of thatched palm fronds. It was packed.

The camp had turned out to a man, woman, and child. The women and children were segregated to the right of a crude pine pulpit which stood on a platform about a foot from the ground. There was no floor. Pine needles, dry and brown, formed a carpet; boards stretched between grocery boxes served for benches.

When Javalie and Martin went in a girl was praying. She prayed in a high, sweet singsong. It was, in effect, a song, shrill and syncopated. Javalie could not make out the words she was singing, but he was thrilled.

Here was true art, primitive and spontaneous, as brilliant as the spectrum. The congregation hummed and beat time with bare feet on the ground, and with heavy, scarred hands on knees and benches, while the girl sang in her shrill, sweet voice, the prayer.

At every break in her voice there occurred ecstatic approvals.

"Have mercy, O Lawd!"

"Ay-men!"

"Yea, Lawd!"

Backs swayed with the beat of it, and murky eyes shone with tears. The girl's voice rose and fell, went faster and faster with the effect of running and pathetically stumbling, now high, now low, like the rising and falling waves of the sea, incoherent except for a timely passionate, rapturous "Have *mercy*, O Lawd!"

The humming rose and fell also, following the intonation like the echo of a lost wind, melancholy, enraptured—a wordless and musical echo of the girl's sweet chant. Her voice fell mournfully low as Javalie and Rev. Dan Martin reached the platform and sat on a rough bench behind the pulpit. It ended on a quavering minor note. There was a rustling.

Javalie looked out over a sea of brilliant color: shirtwaists of coral pink, jade green, purple, magenta, blood red, chrome yellow, through which dusky warm skin shone. Jazzabelle sat in the front row looking up at him with an insolent smile on her lips. They were, in the dark gloom under the palm roof, of a brighter scarlet than last night. Her fascinating brown eyes gleamed as if with mirth. He marked again the curious delicacy of her features, the fragility of her arms, her almost translucent skin, with the red, hot blood coursing under it. She was, with the very posture of her fragile and beautiful body, daring him, mocking him. The imitation coral rings danced at her ears as she shook her head—a taunt.

The Rev. Dan Martin had risen, and was announcing a hymn. He read the first and second verses self-consciously, then in a thin, cracked barytone began to sing it. Javalie had heard neither the name nor the number of the hymn. He was intrigued by Jazzabelle's orange shirtwaist, embroidered with apple green and cut indecorously low.

The hymn was a pagan chant translated into terms of Christianity. Here, once more, was the moving rhythm that the singing girl had set free. Hands and feet beat time. Shoulders swayed; heads rolled. An odor of sweat from toiling bodies gathered like mist on a swamp.

Javalie's diaphonic ears sought in the surging sound a tenor, next a bass, then a contralto: absolute harmony! Like an orchestra of perfectly tuned instruments, or an organ. Negroes, he realized, approached closest to the spontaneous, the basic, in art. They did not have to try.

The hymn ended and the service went on. Martin prayed; another hymn was sung. Javalie heard himself being introduced—"De holy man in sackcloth, lak Hezekiah, whose soul has been purified in de fires of de Lawd, sayin', 'Sinnehs, come unto me. Sinnehs, fo'get yo' selfish lives and walk in de ways of the Lawd!'"

Javalie walked slowly to the pulpit and slowly stretched out his arms with clenched fists, as if he might have been Jove preparing to let loose thunderbolts. His eyes blazed over the congregation and fell to the irreverent face of Jazzabelle. She was grinning up at him expectantly, her teeth like bands of ivory. Javalie threw back his head, flinging the long hair out of his way. He began vibrantly, on an organ note:

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness! No man or woman, white or yellow or black, can walk in the paths of righteousness without reaping everlasting glory!' 'Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid!'"

Round, unblinking eyes were fixed on him. Heads bobbed vehemently.

"Ay-men!"

"Have mercy, O Lawd!"

"No man or woman, white or yellow or black, can walk in the paths of wickedness and shame and escape the fires of hell! 'For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind!'"

"Tha's right!"

"Hm-m-m-m-*mh!* Oh, Lawd!"

"Yea, Lawd!"

"I will not preach to you, my brethren. I will implore you to cast off your garments of wickedness. I will call you from the foul darkness of iniquity into the white and glorious light! What better text could I select than the first verse from the thirty-seventh chapter of Isaiah? 'And it came to pass, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord.'"

"Ay-men!"

"Have mercy, have mercy, O Lawd!"

Jazzabelle's smile had departed. She was looking up into his blazing eyes, his flushed, inspired face, with the look of one gazing upon a rare curiosity. He flung out his arms and cried:

"I say unto you, not one among you is plunged so deeply in the bloody mire of sin and degradation that cannot be cleansed and made whiter than snow. Say in your heart, 'I have sinned; I have wronged; I will go forth and sin no more! I will nevermore wrong man or woman or beast. The laws of Moses will be reflected in my daily acts and attitude. I am a penitent sinner!'

"'Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water?' 'Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.'

"Ask only for forgiveness. And as you have spoken will your sins be forgiven, as if washed away in the sacred waters of the Jordan!"

Javalie waited until the turbulent chorus of agreement had subsided; then, with imploring arms, with his long hair tossing about his head, he exhorted the sinners among them to repent, to exhibit their penitence in this place that had been set apart for that purpose.

He spoke in measured periods. Soon he was conscious of an undercurrent, a rhythm

like the humming of bees in a field. It became a sound; it rose and fell with the undulations of his voice. Heads and bodies were swaying. Jazzabelle was staring up at him with sober, frightened eyes. He was describing the hotness, the tortures, of hell. His voice grew hoarse.

Suddenly the girl who had sung the prayer threw her head back, clapped her hands to her face, and screamed: "Have mercy, have mercy, have mercy!" Curiously, she attracted little attention. She began to moan and rock from side to side. The negro beside her was beating slowly on his knees, his eyes obscured with sweat which ran into them from his forehead. A wild light had appeared in Jazzabelle's eyes. She, too, was swaying and moaning now with the others.

"'Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest.' 'And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' Break forth into joy, sing together! 'Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and ye that have no money, come ye, buy, and eat—yea, come, buy wine without money and without price.'

"'Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.' 'For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.' Come, all ye sinners! Repent and be redeemed! Which shall it be—the joy, the milk and honey, of the heavenly paradise, or the tempests of brimstone, the everlasting fire?"

His voice had become so hoarse that the final exhortations were croaked. "Repent! Repent and be redeemed!" He stopped with a husky overnote and gazed imploringly at Jazzabelle.

Her lips were working rapidly; her eyes were wide and terrified. She leaped up from the bench with a scream and clasped her hands convulsively to her breast, coughing and sobbing.

"O Holy Ghost, I sees you now! I sees you plain! I's coming. I's white—whiter'n de driftin' snow. I's white lak de wool on de little newbo'n lam'. I's been a sinner, but I sin no mo'!"

How red her lips were! The lower one seemed to be spreading like a stain; the stain descended into two thin lines from the corners of her mouth. She pitched forward and clutched the platform.

Four other penitent sinners had cast themselves on their knees beside her—three men and a woman. Two of them Javalie recognized as old acquaintances—Blue and Boll Weevil. The woman mumbled with the toothlessness of old age; she must have been eighty.

Javalie descended from the platform and was surrounded by panting, sweating negroes—not only the ones whom he had snatched from the burning, but, it seemed, the entire congregation. They snatched at his robe, kissed his hands, and hummed and swayed while they did so.

Jazzabelle had fainted. The girl who had sung the prayer lifted her to her feet and carried her out into the sunlight. As soon as Javalie could break through the press he hastened after her, but when he reached the open she was not to be seen. He was exhausted. His face was feverish; a distant beating, like the sound or feel of surf pounding on a rocky coast, pulsed in his ears.

Rev. Dan Martin was beside him, talking and gesticulating excitedly. But he was not listening. The hot fluid in his brain seemed to coalesce. The insinuating rhythm had subsided. The experience he had gone through suddenly became objective.

What a pity! Jazzabelle, the dying echo of an exotic brilliant art, had got religion!

CHAPTER XVI.

THEODORE'S BAPTISM.

"THERE'S trouble enough in what house already?" Javalie repeated irritably.

"Yassuh. Mista Banning's house, Ah means."

"What has that got to do with Jazzabelle?"

Dan Martin looked evasively through the trees toward the begrimed and scaling turpentine still.

"You didn't know, suh? You didn't know young Mista Teddy was runnin' round after dat wicked gal?"

"Oh, no! Ted Banning—Jazzabelle?"

"Yassuh, da's whut Ah means."

Javalie wrinkled his lips as if he had tasted alum.

"Has he been over here?"

"Yassuh—three or fo' times."

"What happened?"

"Nothin', suh—nothin'. He wanted to take Jazzabelle out in dat big yalla cah of hisn."

Javalie snorted. "Wouldn't she go with him?"

"No, *suh*. She was skeered of his poppa. Ah was the one whut skeered her, holy man. She was fixin' to go out wid him; but I tol' her Mista Banning would sho' clap de skids on her. One mo' time an' she'd done gone. Da's why Ah say, you dunno how happy Ah am. 'At missy of his, whut dey calls Mme. Jeanne—nevah wasn't no nicer lady nowheh. No, *suh!*" They were crossing the railroad tracks now. Ahead of them, over the scrub palmettos and hummocks of yellow sand, the house of Banning blazed in the brilliance of a noon sun. In the intense white light of midday it had a different character; it was like a mirage seen over a desert, a trick of heat waves and aërial reflections. The blue tile roof radiated a more splendid blue than the dancing sea beyond. The foliage of the gardens summoned images of playing fountains, of strolling ladies with curly ink-black hair and satiny tallow skins, ravishing creatures with blood-red roses at their ears, and gorgeous scarfs about their lovely, disdainful shoulders—daughters of some arrogant Moorish conqueror.

"This wind *does* blow from Grenada!"

Dan Martin glanced at him in perplexity. He was saying, he repeated, that Mr. Teddy ought to be ashamed. Mme. Jeanne was, or had been, the one bright and happy spot in the house. The servants, himself included, loved her—she was such a little thing! She never said a quick word to any one. And the life she led could hardly be imagined. Mr. Teddy ignored her or cursed her; she was weeping in her room most of the time. Mr. Banning shouted at her; Miss Nanette was mean to her. From a happy little butterfly of a person she had been reduced to a drooping moth. "Cryin' to husse'f *all* de time. Slinkin' about dat big grand house lak a kitten whut come up to be petted and got kicked instead. Yessuh. And dat Jazzabelle! H'm-m-m-m-mh! Holy man, you do mo' good in one minnit den mos' folkses do in a lifetime, and da's so!"

"Dan," said Javalie decisively, "I want you to find Mr. Teddy and send him to me. I'll be down by the beach. Tell him I want to see him. If he is asleep, wake him up."

"Yassuh! Ah'm gwine pray fo' you, too!"

Javalie went around by the porte-cochère. A Sunbeam landaulet, painted the color of new rifle steel, was standing by the steps with a chauffeur in the driver's seat in blue whipcord to match. There was a crest in gold, silver and black on the door. Javalie glanced at it, but attached no significance to the unicorn rampant on a field of glossy black. He was thinking of other things. The chauffeur eyed him with a gaping incredulity until Javalie passed from sight around a turn.

But Javalie was plunged too deeply in thought to notice him. His hypocritical rôle of redeemer in the colored Baptist Church had seemed to dislodge something inside of him. The memory of Jazzabelle with blood at her lips as she had pitched to her knees in the pine needles was almost intolerably oppressive. His heart was beating sharply with an irrepressible resentment. That beautiful, evil face—stricken! Beaten to earth by *juju* rhythm; driven to her knees by the stage mechanics of a translated Voodooism! Evil incarnate, artistically perfect, trampled under fox-trotting black feet!

What was this morbid pull she exerted upon him? Why this furious sizzling in his brain pan? Oh, damn the girl! But he could not dismiss her, or the other members of this unconventional triangle, so simply.

There was Mme. Jeanne to consider, too —poor little Mme. Jeanne, who dared not tell her husband that she would, before long, have a baby. Teddy, the sullen, wretched victim of his father's abortive paternal pride and egotism. Teddy goaded to a rendezvous with a juke-girl! And the more he thought about it the angrier at Teddy he became. The selfish young beast! The unspeakable coward! He deserved a sound thrashing!

Javalie endeavored in vain to cast these dangerous thoughts out, and he only became more hostile toward Teddy. He had been caught protestingly in the hot, racing cogs of a machine whose product was emotional impulse. So far and no farther he retained his precious faculty of looking the situation objectively in the face.

He knew that it would be wiser to sit down somewhere and cool off rather than risk a talk with Mme. Jeanne's husband. But the march of events carried him sternly on to that meeting. Dan Martin was waiting for him on the service porch when he passed. Mr. Teddy was not in his room. He had had a late breakfast, and had been seen a half hour ago walking down the path toward the ocean. He was, presumably, going swimming, than which there is nothing better for banishing the horrid aches of the morning after.

Now, Javalie had made three prophecies the night before, and all but one had already been realized. The first was to the effect that Nanette Banning would flirt with him; the second, that Mme. Jeanne would come to him weeping, having been weeping, or about to weep, pleading for religious comfort; thirdly, he had prophesied that Theodore P. Banning, Jr., would find some excuse for picking a quarrel with him before he had been in the house twenty-four hours.

Something more than prophetic instinct assured him that the trio was now to be completed.

Teddy, in a white-and-black silk swimming suit, was lying face down in the hot sand. He had been in; the suit was plastered to him and his hair was wet and sandy. He looked up when Javalie was a dozen feet away—looked up from crimsoned eyes with dark pouches under them, and a slow, curling smile. He pushed himself up on his elbows and waggled his feet in the air.

"Hello, holy roller, how many souls have you yanked off the coals so far this morning?"

Javalie gazed down at him pensively.

"Five souls have been gathered into the fold to-day, my friend."

The young man scowled. "Say, can't you talk plain American? I am sick of listening to that holier-than-thou stuff."

"I will say this much in plain American, to begin with," Javalie replied evenly. "You are a contemptible little coward. Is that plain enough to suit?"

Ted Banning stared up at him with an expression of stunned amazement. Slowly he came to his feet, and slowly his face became crimson, next his neck and shoulders, even his arms. He was, as his mother had been, rather slow to anger.

"I'll give you a chance to explain that," he drawled, "but you'd better talk damned fast!"

Javalie had not moved, but a muscle under his right eye was twitching. He still stood about ten feet away from the heir to the Banning millions. His eyes were steady and frostily hard.

"I will try to explain a number of things," he said. "You are a coward because—"

"If you call me that again I'll smash you!"

"*You—are—a—coward!*"

Ted Banning came at him like a charging lion, with lowered head and flailing arms. Javalie sidestepped quickly and caught him sharply under the chin with his cupped hand.

The boy's head snapped back and he dropped sprawling into the sand. He sprang up, spitting.

"Damn your soul!"

He threw himself at Javalie recklessly. Javalie struck his fists aside with the sweep of one arm; then, with the other, caught him about the shoulders, lifted him face up over his head, kicking and cursing, and walked down the beach and into the water. The boy hammered and clawed at him, but

Javalie walked out into the waves until he was waist deep. Then he plunged him under and held him there.

When he let him up the boy choked and strangled and gasped. He fought furiously, but Javalie held him in an embrace of iron. He plunged him under a second time, then lifted his face to the surface and held him there by the throat.

"When you are ready to admit that you are a coward and will listen to the rest of what I have to say to you, just stop struggling."

Ted Banning gulped and choked out: "I will kill you for this!"

Javalie submerged him a third time, and suddenly the boy stopped struggling. He came up, gagging and strangling, clinging to Javalie's shoulders, and sobbed as he fought for breath.

"Are you a coward?" Javalie said quietly.

"Yes! Yes! Good God, let me go!"

"Will you talk decently?"

"Yes! Oh, please take me to shore!"

Javalie threw him over his shoulder, carried him to the beach, and set him upon his feet.

CHAPTER XVII.

"MY WIFE IS AN OPEN BOOK."

FOR a moment the boy glared at him hatefully, then his eyes filled with tears. He sat down heavily in the sand and trembled. He wiped his eyes with the backs of his hands, and the last trace of anger and hatred was gone.

Javalie dropped down in the sand beside him.

Teddy blurted: "Listen. I—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to go for you that way. What you did was all right—that ducking. I—I needed it! I know you're only trying to help me. God knows I need some one to help me out. I'm just about crazy. Do you—want to help me straighten things out?"

"Teddy," Javalie said gravely, "I am beginning to suspect that I ducked the wrong person. Now that I have had a good look at you, I can see something that I missed entirely when I looked you over before. When I looked you over before I thought you were a sulky, sophisticated brat. I apologize. You're what every one means when they speak of a nice kid. You are a nice kid, but you are about a thousand miles off the track.

"You got off without knowing how it happened. You're sore at the world, aren't you? You're sore at your wife, your father and your sister—and Heaven knows how many others! You have been drinking like a fish, and raising Cain generally. On top of it all, you think life is a tragic mistake."

"How can I help it?" the young man cried out. "When any one's been disillusioned the way I've been, what else is there for them to think?"

Javalie sifted some sand through his fingers. "You've asked a man's-sized question, Ted. What is disillusionment? Married people use the term so much. Let's get this disillusionment business cleared up before we go on to practical solutions. Let's take it up in connection with the man-and-wife question. That's what you have really got to settle, isn't it? Your father is, really, a secondary consideration. The main issue is—you and Jeanne."

Ted Banning shook his head stubbornly. "It's no use. I've no use for women at all. I tell you I've been disillusioned. I'm sorry I'm married. That sounds rotten, but I can't help it."

"Don't you love her any more?"

"No"—defiantly.

"Do you feel like telling me why?"

"Sure! I want to tell you everything. You—you know about these things. If you can fix me up—go to it. But you can't fix *that* up. I'm sick of her, that's why. I'm sick of seeing her mope around. She hasn't any more pep than a rabbit. I can't stand the sight of her."

"Let's get this straight. How about other women?"

"Absolutely the same! I can't stand them."

"H-m. How about this—Jazzabelle, over at the camp?"

The boy looked up sharply. "Who told you anything about that?"

"Didn't you want to take her riding in that big yellow Stutz of yours?"

"Well?"

"You were planning to go completely to the devil. Was that it?"

"I tell you," Teddy snapped, "when anybody's been as disillusioned as I've been—"

Javalie stopped him with a comprehending nod.

"Now we have a few facts to work with. You have been using that word 'disillusioned' pretty freely. We are back again to the man-and-wife business. Misunderstandings, rows, separations, divorces, and what is colloquially known as 'cheating.' The victims generally explain their actions on the ground of disillusionment. It has a pleasingly cynical sound, hasn't it? Do you suppose there is a cure?"

"Is there?" his listener demanded eagerly.

"I have been puzzling over it a good many years," Javalie answered, "and I have come to the conclusion that there is at least a preventative. There is no use looking for a cure if a man is a hopeless cripple or a woman loses her attractiveness prematurely. Generally there isn't. I'm not dealing with the exceptions. Generally the hopeless cases are biological, and there is no cure. We won't consider them.

"Unhappy husbands and wives—the ones you might call normally unhappy ones—speak of disillusionment as if it were something that they had been poisoned with. I mean, they speak of being disillusioned when they mean they have been deceived, bitterly disappointed. But a person who is actually disillusioned is one who has simply lost his infantile fancies, his beliefs in the perfect man or the perfect woman, and so on.

"Such a person has learned to see facts as facts. He no longer colors them—or discolors them. A properly disillusioned man or woman is not bitter or resentful, but intelligent and steadied. Bitterness and cynicism are parts of the process, but they aren't the final result, as so many victims—yourself, for example—would seem to prove.

"The whole trouble is that those who think they are disillusioned are not actually disillusioned—they are only bruised and irritated because they don't understand. They blame without learning. They don't know. They don't *understand*. That is because all women and most men do not reason things out logically. When they think they are thinking, they are only letting their emotions carry them to some decision.

"Of course, if you are devoted to some one—for example, as Jeanne is devoted to you—and you are dropped, no longer loved, neat reasoning does not help much, any more than it helps when you suddenly see a bomb exploding at your feet. You can only wait for time to make a readjustment—and meanwhile keep faith."

Ted Banning gazed thoughtfully at the waves curling in and collapsing in smothers of creamy foam.

"You say the cure is knowledge. Just what do you mean? Give me a specific instance."

"Know thy wife."

"And know thy husband? Well, I know Jeanne like a book."

"That's a beginning. Does Jeanne know you?"

"If she doesn't, it's because she hasn't the capacity."

"Is it?"

Ted flared up. "I don't see your argument at all. I can apply it next time, though."

"Don't be in too much of a hurry. You are not through with Jeanne yet. Let's start in from the other angle. Your father has not played square with you, has he?"

"He certainly has not."

"He tried to get you a rocking chair majority in Washington during the war."

"You bet he did! But it didn't work. I went to France, anyhow."

"And when you came back—with Jeanne—you had visions of going into business, either with your father or for yourself. But you wanted to live your own life. You and Jeanne were going to live in a little white house on a hill—"

"Yeh," Teddy interrupted dryly, "I heard Jeanne handing you that line."

"And," Javalie went on, "your father

wouldn't listen to it. Wanted you with him. Wanted you where he could bully you and boss you around to his heart's content."

Teddy slapped his legs. "That's the honest truth!"

"And you were helpless—no practical training, no opportunities. So, being helpless and bullied at the same time, you have been getting hotter and hotter. You could not take it out with much satisfaction on your father, because his hide is too thick; so you began taking it out on Jeanne, on the good old principle that we love to destroy those whom we love most. It was about then that you began to think you had stopped caring for her."

"I don't think it. I know it."

Javalie sighed in despair.

"She thinks the sun rises and sets in you, Ted."

Ted nodded gloomily. "I know it. It's tough."

"Yet I am pretty certain that you would love her harder than ever if you could cut loose—with a little capital from your father. You've a right to it, I think."

"He ought to owe me something for the chances he's made me miss!"

"He certainly ought to! Yes, if you were to do that—and take Jeanne away, and live by yourselves, without any prying, selfish parent about—you'd be the happiest man alive."

Teddy sighed miserably. "No; it's too late. My—my life is ruined."

Javalie smiled.

"Teddy, will you promise to stay right where you are while I give you the shock of your young life? Promise not to do anything rash?"

Teddy was watching him intently.

"You can't shock *me*."

"Yes; I know you are disillusioned—and cynical, like all the rest of the new generation. But one never can tell. What I'm going to tell you is the truth, not malicious gossip, and I am giving it to you for a practical purpose. A certain man, Teddy, is so sure that you are going to finish up your job of breaking your wife's heart that he has promised to be waiting for her the day she leaves you."

"You're a liar."

Javalie started to rise, and settled down again with a tight smile.

"Ted, let's not have any more baptizings to-day. I am dealing in verified facts. This man is trying, at every opportunity, to make love to your wife."

Ted Banning scrambled to his feet with eyes blazing and fists clutched at sides.

"I'll kill that—"

"No, you won't, Ted. You will leave him entirely to me. His type happens to be familiar to me."

"The beach lizard!"

"Yes, that's the type, Ted—more to be pitied than damned. To him a woman in distress means a woman accessible. He closely resembles one of those fish hawks out there. You see him skimming along close to the water. When a poor little fish is chased up to the surface by a big fish, the hawk is there to grab him.

"It's the hawk's nature, just as it's Reynolds's nature, but it happens, unfortunately, to be Reynolds's weakness to boot. It's only the outcropping of a streak that runs straight through the man. Pay out enough rope and he will eventually hang himself.

"Well, you didn't know that about Jeanne, did you? Sit down. I am only trying to show you that wives aren't the open books they sometimes seem. They demand a very intensive kind of study. It's curious, too, about just that. The more you study one woman, the more interesting she becomes. Positively absorbing!

"Why, there isn't any science, anything, half so interesting. A woman is the most marvelous mechanism ever created. Did you ever consider that? The little things a woman who loves you is doing all the time to make you happy? And the big things she will sacrifice? And the way her brain will work, and her intuitions, to further whatever you are fighting for? Stupendous! And, marvel above all other marvels—her children! Your children. It's hard to imagine Jeanne as a mother—she's such a little thing. Ted, think of that brown-eyed darling nursing a son—your son!"

"Thank God," Teddy said huskily, "we don't have to!"

"Supposing you speak to Jeanne about that."

White patches appeared under Teddy's eyes. "What?"

Javalie nodded sadly.

"That's what I have been leading up to, Ted. I wanted to—sound you out. It is going to be pretty hard for Jeanne to go through with it—alone. That is what I was thinking."

Ted Banning continued to gape at him. His brain did not work as rapidly as his father's. It took a long time for anything so cataclysmic to be digested. He blurted out, "Look here—" and buried his face in his hands.

He looked up suddenly, his eyes smoldering.

"If that damned beach snake so much as looks sidewise at my wife—"

"Protect her, certainly; that's what husbands are for."

"I'll ring his rotten neck!"

"Stick a knife into him."

The boy glared. "You're laughing at me!"

"I will say once more, Ted, that I want you to leave Reynolds alone. Hands off. Let me attend to him in my own way. Let me pay out a little more rope. You don't want to spoil my plans, do you?"

"Well—"

"That's a promise."

"All right. But look here. I—I've got to talk to Jeanne, you know. I— Well—"

"A little explaining must be done, of course. But you will have to go about it diplomatically. Remember, a girl in her condition is a very fragile thing—apt to fly to pieces if she isn't handled so. You will have to break it to her gently; you will have to lead up to it as tactfully as possible, then simply explain the circumstances—as nicely as you know how. If I were you, I wouldn't *say* that I'd grown tired of her—"

"But don't you *understand?*" the boy broke in fiercely. "I *haven't* grown tired of her. I—I've been a damn fool. *That's* what's going to be hard to explain."

"It will not require much oratory," Javalie dryly assured him, "to convince her of that."

Teddy started through the sand, stopped and returned with gleaming eyes. He grasped Javalie's hand. Then, "Thank you for—for the ducking!" he stammered.

He hurried up the path and entered the house. Mme. Jeanne had not yet come down, a maid told him. She had had *petit dejeuner* served in her room. At Mme. Jeanne's room he hesitated, decided not to knock, turned the knob and strode in.

Mme. Jeanne was standing at a window with her back toward him. She wore a fluffy, lacey pink-and-white negligee trimmed at the sleeves and throat with white rabbit fur. It was one that he had got for her in Paris when they were first married.

She had not heard him open the door, but she turned quickly when it closed, and clasped her hands to her breast in a nervous movement. She began to speak rapidly before he was halfway down the room to her, in the breathless, mechanical way of one who has studied, many times, a painful speech.

"Teddy, I have decided to go back to my father," she said rapidly. She spoke in French. "I have been thinking it all over. I cannot understand the American people. I am afraid I have not the intelligence. I have tried. I—I—"

Her small breast was heaving. Mme. Jeanne was, it was only too evident, on the verge of one of her characteristic outbursts of weeping.

But she tried again, resolutely, with her little fists gripped at her sides and her little head held heroically up.

"Teddy, it is simply that we made, in the madness of the war, a great mistake. I have been stubborn, like a mule. I have refused to see that I am in the way here. I wish—I—" She choked. The deluge had come.

She was in Teddy's arms. He was squeezing her with such ferocity that she could hardly breathe. She stiffened. For a moment astonishment crowded the tears back. Then she became limp in his arms.

"Oh, Jeanne!" the boy groaned. "My poor little Jeanne!"

Javalie had spoken with wisdom. In such moments eloquence is superfluous. A kiss is a thousand explanations, ten thousand apologies.

It was the first time Teddy had kissed his wife in many weeks, and his ardor was that of a lost lover who had rediscovered paradise.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

JAVALIE did not move until Ted Banning had gone from sight up the path of royal palms, scattering sand from his wet bathing suit as he went; then he swung his head around and gazed critically at the fish hawks volplaning close to the water. A shadow flitted across him. Javalie started, with a quick flush coloring his dark skin. Being approached stealthily from the rear, surprised, was an experience he had never grown fond of.

A girl's voice, sweet and richly ironical, cried out:

"Good mornin', Mr. Pollyanna!"

Nanette Banning, in a small white felt hat, a sport coat of lettuce green perllaine, a skirt of white crape pongee, white wool stockings and buckskin shoes, presented a picture so different from the blue-dyed hula-girl of last night that he did not at once recognize her.

Her blue eyes were glittering with some excitement, and her skin was glowing. He had not observed last night how lovely her skin really was. Leading the kind of existence she did, Providence must have made some special dispensation in her favor. The midday sun reflected up in a hard glare from the water and sand permitted no doubts to exist. It glowed roseately, really flowerlike, under a kind of pollen, although whether this was the pollen of youth or the pollen of some exclusive Parisian manufacturer it was not so easy to say.

Whether his pleasure at beholding her was due to his purely artistic sense of appreciation for the completely lovely, or the coming together of other responsive and less easily managed trains of thought, it would have been harder still to say. At all events, the daughter of Theodore P. Banning was so refreshing in her cool sweetness that he caught his breath, then expelled it in the deepest of sighs.

She had dropped down lightly in the sand beside him, picked up his hand, and squeezed it.

"What are you doing here?"

"It is a fitting place," he answered with his benevolent smile, "for meditation on the Sabbath."

Nan's eyes, searching his, still glittering with excitement, now narrowed a little.

"Javalie darling, you're an old fraud. The wind was blowing the right way, and I heard almost every word of it."

"Oh," said Javalie.

"Yes," said Nan. "I was hiding in the bath-house. I followed you down here from the house. I saw the fight. I saw the baptizing. I hearkened to thy saccharine words of counsel. It almost sickened me. Really it did! 'The little things a woman who loves you is doing all the time to make you happy!' Oh, Javalie! What do you know about love? Where did you learn about women—in the Encyclopædia Britannica? Listen to me now, Javalie, *mio*, I am not going to let you talk church-talk to me any longer. You were talking American to Ted. It's my language, too. I rather liked what you said about disillusionment. Up to that point I agreed with almost everything you said, but after that you became positively syrupy!

"I understand, of course, that you adjust your appeal to the intellect of your convert. Dan was telling me about your sermon at the camp. I think he envies you frightfully. He's been trying to rouse them for years. He's only one of seven ordained ministers over there—and goodness knows how many ordained deacons there are—and not one of them has been able to come within a hundred miles of what you did to-day.

"If I were narrow I would say you were a hypocrite—after listening to the line you handed Ted. But I know that you're not—you're simply adaptable. I wonder what your line will be when you begin working on me?"

"I will probably make passionate avowals of my undying love for you," Javalie replied gravely.

Nan shook her head briskly. "No, you won't, Javalie. The unities are complete

now—the time, the place, and me. There's not a soul near, and—you just sit there. I think "—eying him judicially—" that you would make love the way you do everything else, with wonderful abandon under the control of a perfect mechanical technique. Your victim would not realize that she was dealing in counterfeit coin. Good heavens! I never saw such colossal reserve in my life! I wish you'd teach me how. Here I come out wantonly and tell you I dote on you!"

He realized that she was determined to finish what she had started so admirably last night—parrying for a weak spot in his armor.

"And yet," he sighed, "you envy me my technique!"

"It is not technique!" Nan cried indignantly. "I am simply up-to-date. Modern women don't wait to be rushed. Didn't you know that, Javalie? Ah, we're so hard we positively glitter! Do I have to repeat that I have been waiting all my life for a man like you to come along? Look at me! I throw myself at you! I surrender myself without a struggle! Oo-la-la!

"I like everything about you but two things—the way you do your hair, and your adaptability. You make me uneasy. You are like mercury. When I think you're so-and-so, and try to grasp that, you squirt out of my fingers and go trickling off into some new bewildering pattern. You don't mind my pulling you apart this way, of course?"

"No," Javalie returned soberly. "I like just hearing you talk. You have a beautiful voice. I love the sound of it."

"Javalie! Stop that this instant! I am serious!"

"So am I!"

She eyed him sternly. "Very well. Go on. Be romantic."

"This morning," he said tremulously, "when I looked at the night sky—a minute or two before the sun came up—I wondered what it reminded me of. It was your eyes."

"Javalie," she stopped him, "I don't think you're a darned bit thoughtful. This is one of the most serious moments in a woman's life. You must not trifle that way. The S. P. C. A. will get after you."

"Very well," he said more softly still. "What chance, what possible shadow of a glimmer of a chance, have I?"

"Are you in earnest, Javalie darlin'?"

"Only look at me!"

Nanette looked at him demurely. "Are you going to tell me now that a poor, penniless young pilgrim dare not aspire to the hand of a daughter of Theodore Pluvius Banning?"

"Possibly."

"But, darling," she said, "that argument is automatically knocked for a row of Egyptian pyramids! Father won't let me marry until I am thirty. If I marry before then I am persona non checkbook—unless you have persuaded him to do what you said last night you were going to do, which I know durned well you haven't. Be of brave heart, dearest—the argument is demolished."

"The obstacle," Javalie pointed out, "has still to be surmounted."

"Ah! You mean the luxuries to which I have been accustomed."

He nodded.

"Love doesn't count at all?"

"It counts for too much to be needlessly risked."

"Oh, Javalie, are you trying to show me a good time, or are you simply getting more and more rational? Tell me, did you ever have an honest-to-goodness emotion?"

He looked across the heat waves to the ocean, and over the ocean to the knifelike skyline, where the smudge from a steamer stained the soft blue.

"Look at me!" she commanded.

His eyes returned sparklingly to her flushed face.

"Javalie, you're lying to me. You're dying to grab me! You're just craving to smother me with kisses! Well, at that, I am kind of sweet. And I'm awfully appreciative!"

Javalie clasped his hands firmly upon one knee and looked back at the smoke. He was vastly uncomfortable.

"We'll naturally concede all that," he said dryly. "We admit we love each other."

"Madly."

"And that, in the words of the Chinese poet, we have been doomed for each other, like the reflection of the moon on the little lake."

"Lovely!"

"Well," he said with a tumultuous sigh, "it is a great relief to be assured."

"Javalie, stop kidding me! I do want to do something that isn't silly and useless. I am as cynical as Bernard Shaw and as disillusioned as Joseph Conrad, but I'm tired of the pose. I'm tired of being so hard that I glitter. I want some romance. I'm simply starved for love. And I want to do something—like the kind of thing you are doing."

A picture of the satiny gray steel door of Mr. Banning's private vault flickered, cinemalike, through his mind.

"You may not realize it," Nan went on sternly, "but I have a frightful temper. I can stand being ignored and having my delicate sensibilities trampled on just so long, and then— Or didn't you know that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned?"

"I suspected it," Javalie replied. "It seems to me I read that in a book."

"All right. Some day you'll be sorry."

He said with a guilty air: "I'm sorry now."

"Man, aren't you even going to let me save my face?"

"I love you."

"Why, Javalie!"

"And it can't be."

"There's some one else!"

"There has never been any one—else."

Again, softer than before: "Why, Javalie—Javalie, darn you, you're not letting me save my face at all. And you're trying not to laugh."

"Shall we let it go at that?"

"You're going to give me up, then, without a struggle?"

He said with surprise: "Without a struggle?"

"In that case," said Nan demurely, "why struggle?"

"And then?"

"Why," she cried with a joyous laugh, "we'll live happily ever after! Don't you think we would, Javalie?"

"I wonder."

"Big loves like ours *are* so rare, Javalie."

"That's what I have been told."

She sighed with exasperation. "Up to a certain point you play the game better than it's written in the book; and then you do that mercury act of yours. Paradox; riddles; mystery. Why are you so reticent, so mysterious? Javalie, who the devil are you, anyway? Your arrival was suspiciously timed with the Palm Beach Limited last night. Did you realize that?"

"When I have gone," he replied, "I will write a letter and tell you everything—what sins I have committed, why I am wearing sackcloth; everything."

"Uhuh. When are you going, my dear?"

"As soon as I have finished what I have started."

"Redeeming us wicked Bannings?"

"Yes."

"Well," she said indulgently, "you can plan to linger longer. Mother is here, and I think she plans to stick around a while."

"Your mother?"

"Didn't you know I had one? Well, *technically* she's my mother. She's Lady Zelda Northam now. She left us when I was ten, and married Lord Northam, the publisher, you know? Yes. She couldn't stand dad, and she married Lord Northam, who happened—and still happens—to be about seven years younger.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised but what that is why she is here. It's her first appearance in fourteen years. Oh, I've seen her, but very distantly. There've been rumors in the papers for months—that Javanese dancer—Nahrdanna?"

Javalie recalled the Sunbeam landaulet under the porte-cochère and the unicorn rampant on a field of glossy black.

"I've been expecting something like this for some time," Nan went on. "Married people who've had children don't seem to realize how really inescapably they're bound, do they?"

She seemed reconciled to abandoning the other topic—the tilting match. Javalie made no comment on the new one. He sat in silence, examining her white hand spread out on the sand beside it. Well, why shouldn't it be a beautiful hand?

Nan was following with an equal absence of acute interest the stiff-legged, brisk perigrinations of three sandpipers down near the water's edge. She said aloud, but really to herself: "I suppose one of them is unwelcome."

Reducing life to terms of sex was as natural with her as, with Javalie, it was to reduce life to terms of art. He would probably have said the three sandpipers at the water's edge were rather Japanese.

Her head was tilted, and one cheek was pillowed on a hunched shoulder. She was miles away from the birds now. She withdrew her attention from the water and concentrated it brightly on Javalie.

"I was interested in what you told Teddy about Pete, Javalie. I don't believe a word of it. Jeanne is as ignorant of life as if she came out of the convent yesterday. Oh, she's a sweet little thing—from a man's standpoint—just the one for Ted if he can ever escape from dad's clutches. He's sappy, too—or he wouldn't have swallowed what you said—plus all that salt water. They're perfectly suited, of course. It isn't that I'm catty. No woman is very broad-minded, but I not a bit narrower than most.

"Jeanne simply has one of those fervid imaginations. She's the kind that thinks a man is going to attack her if he happens to touch her foot under the table with his. Thank God she is going to have a baby. I suspected it myself, and I think it will turn Ted into a model husband."

"I am sorry you heard," Javalie said.

"It doesn't change my feelings about Pete in the least," she assured him sweetly. "You really did him a wrong when you compared him to those fish hawks. He's awfully nice, and he's trying hard to brace up and be a man.

"You can't realize how that poor fellow has suffered. His people were quite rich at one time, and he was raised—the only child—to believe that the world was his own especial oyster. It isn't his fault he's a beach lizard; and if he preys on women in distress, as you say, which I think is untrue and mighty unfair, only his mother is to blame.

"When their money went she continued to have delusions of grandeur. Wouldn't let Pete cut loose and make the grade by himself. She adored him, naturally, and he wouldn't break her heart by leaving her and going to New York, where he had some influential friends. She was a Bostoner, one of the most horrible examples of the type. And when she finally freed him by dying of a cancer, it was too late.

"Dad doesn't like Pete. I explained all that to him, and he said that if Pete had had any guts he would have cut loose from her. He didn't apply it to himself at all. I wonder if many parents have this disease of the ego? Javalie, you haven't forgotten that I gave you just twenty-four hours, do you?"

"No, I haven't forgotten."

"You don't want me to run away with Pete, do you?"

He considered her gravely. "Would you, Nan?"

"Answer my question, Javalie."

"No," he said, "I don't. You could not make a more foolish mistake."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I must go. Have lunch with me, Javalie. Two thirty. *'Voir!*"

She was up and away before he could reply, and when he got to his feet—his robe had in some way become entangled with them—her reason for bolting became apparent.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

TWO PROMISES

By BARONESS VON HUTTEN, author of "Pam"

has been selected as the Complete Novelette for our Fortieth Anniversary Number next week, which will be an issue in every way worthy of the occasion.

The Adventures of Peabody Smith

By WILLIAM J. FLYNN,
Former Chief, United States Secret Service,
and GEORGE BARTON.

VI.—THAT AFFAIR AT THE BALDWIN.

PEABODY SMITH lay back in a padded armchair in his den drinking in the wit and wisdom of Josh Billings. He always contended that thorough knowledge of the Bible, Shakespeare and the inimitable Billings would give any intelligent man a liberal education. And now with a rainy afternoon and no work to do he was having the time of his life reveling in his favorite humorist. He had finished about a quart of tea, and was lighting his fifth Pittsburgh stogie when the telephone bell began its monotonous ringing. The detective picked it up grudgingly and said yawningly:

"This is Peabody Smith—what do you want?"

The answer that came over the wire, in a clear, steady voice, not only stifled the yawn, but caused him to sit up with the suddenness of a man who has had a bowl of cold water thrown into his face.

The voice on the other end of the telephone was saying:

"This is the Hotel Baldwin, on West Eighty-Seventh Street. Barry Caldwell is talking. I have just murdered a man, and want you to come up here at once. Say you'll come."

For one of the few times in his life the

The first story of this series appeared in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 28.

veteran detective was nonplused. His mental faculties were frozen. He knew Barry Caldwell intimately. He was a young and promising dramatist who led a most wholesome life, and the thought of his being concerned in a real tragedy seemed preposterous. When the dazed mind of the listener began to work he thought his friend might be trying to have some sport at his expense, but the tone of the voice rather than the words convinced Peabody that this was an actual call for help. He wasted no time in foolish questions. He merely glanced at his watch and replied:

"I'll be there within a half hour."

Josh Billings was tossed aside, and the detective managed to get into his street clothes in double-quick time. At the door of his apartment he was lucky enough to catch a cab, and the bribe he placed in the driver's hand was an invitation to violate all the traffic laws.

On the way to Eighty-Seventh Street Peabody Smith tried to prepare himself for what was to come, but his imagination for once was not equal to the task. He made one guess after another, but each in turn was cast aside as inadequate. He knew that the Baldwin was a quiet family hotel, and he had a faint recollection that Barry Caldwell lived in that neighborhood, but why he should murder any one was beyond his power of comprehension.

Young Caldwell was a man of good habits. If he drank at all it was sparingly. He was gifted and he was industrious. His latest play was in the midst of a successful run at one of the Broadway houses, and if any man had a future in his chosen profession that man was Barry Caldwell. He was a bachelor, and, so far as Peabody Smith was aware, did not have any love affairs. He had known him for several years, in the early days of his struggling authorship, and on more than one occasion they had sat up together thinking out the probability of plots. And now this thing came like a weird moving picture show.

The sudden stopping of the taxicab by the side of the curb reminded him that he had reached his destination. He jumped out of the vehicle lightly and started toward the entrance to the Baldwin. Everything seemed normal and placid there, but when the detective got into the hallway he found an excited little group around the elevator. The operator seemed to recognize him, for he waved him aside and said:

"They are all waiting for you on the third floor."

Once there the detective hurried to a lighted apartment near the end of the corridor. Some one passed him in the hall and ran downstairs. Without any preliminaries Peabody Smith turned the knob and walked into the room.

The scene which presented itself was dramatic in the extreme. Prostrate on the floor, with his glazed eyes staring upward, lay the dead body of a man. A few feet away, looking fixedly at the corpse, stood Barry Caldwell, white as a sheet, but self-composed. In a corner, rocking herself to and fro, in a paroxysm of grief was a young woman. Next to the door, angry and sullen looking, stood a policeman. The faintest shadow of a smile hovered about the lips of the young dramatist as the detective appeared. He waved his hand gently in the direction of the young woman.

"I'm glad you are here, Peabody," he said easily. "This is Miss Kayne—we are in her apartment."

Smith recognized the young woman as a popular moving picture star. The screen and the billboards had made her face so familiar that practically everybody knew Miss Mary Kayne.

"The dead man on the floor," continued Caldwell in the same matter-of-fact tone, "you will probably remember as Howard Harper."

The detective did recall him easily as a well-known man about town. Nearly everybody on Broadway knew him as one of the idle butterflies of fashion—a man with a superabundance of wealth and very little brains. In the last year he had had several escapades, and very few of them were to his credit.

He had no scruples, and his whole object in life was amusement. He had his private yacht, his cars and all of the things that are supposed to make existence endurable. And now he lay here on the floor of this modest apartment, stark in death.

Peabody Smith in these few seconds had much upon which to moralize, but the strangest part of it was that he should have been so unexpectedly injected into a tragedy in which all concerned should be so well known to him, either by fact or reputation. While he was thinking he was aroused by the sound of Barry Caldwell's voice.

"I'll try to tell what happened as briefly as possible," the dramatist was saying. "I had an engagement here this evening to read a new play to Miss Kayne. While we were engaged Harper came in without invitation. He had met her once or twice at one of the studios, and he presumed on that slight acquaintance to push himself where he wasn't wanted. He was drunk and offensive. We became engaged in a quarrel, and he pulled a pistol on me. It was his life or mine, and I shot him. It was a case of self-defense. That's all there is to it. I sent for you in hope that we might spare Miss Kayne. She was not involved. The officer here was good enough to wait until you arrived. I want you to vouch for my honesty and to tell him that it is not necessary to do anything with her. I'm ready to surrender and to answer for the consequences."

This casual and offhand method of disposing of a ghastly murder was disconcerting, even to the usually imperturbable Peabody Smith. He turned to Barry Caldwell curiously.

"If—if there has been a murder there must have been a weapon."

"Oh, yes," replied the dramatist readily, and putting his hand in his hip pocket he pulled out a revolver and passed it to the detective. "I think," he said, "you will find that one of the cartridges has been discharged."

Peabody looked at the shining thing and slipped it into his pocket. He glanced around the apartment, and then turned to the policeman.

"Has anything been disturbed here?"

"No," barked the other with evident irritation, "and if youse people are through with your talkfest I'll take this man to the station house. I don't know why I waited for any private detective, anyhow."

"There is nothing like getting at the facts," suggested Peabody gently.

"Facts!" snorted the other, shoving his cap back on his head and getting a firmer grip on his club. "What do ye mean by facts. Ain't he confessed? What more do you want?"

"Officer," interposed Barry Caldwell, "your logic is unimpeachable. You see you have them flabbergasted."

The patrolman stared at the young man as if he imagined he had gone out of his mind. Then he took him by the arm and they left the room together. Miss Kayne, with the tears streaming down her face, started to follow them, but Caldwell waved her back in an authoritative manner.

"You'll only make it worse, Mary," he said. "Take my advice, and be guided by what I say."

"But," she protested, "I am the one at fault. I—"

He laughed.

"Just because it happened in your room? Nonsense. Peabody Smith there has the story. He can take care of you, and we'll demonstrate that Howard Harper is better dead than alive. In the meantime you go about your work, mind your own business and let other people do the talking."

The next half hour was a busy one. What with the commitment of Barry Caldwell, the arrival of the coroner, the removal of the body and the pacifying of Miss Kayne, Peabody Smith was an exceedingly busy man. The shrewd detective began to understand that Caldwell had really sent for him to guard the little movie star. She was all alone under distressing circumstances. At the moment she was even without the traditional stage mother. She wept almost constantly, and the keen investigator realized that her grief was not for the dead man, but for the dramatist who accepted his position in such a debonair fashion. So the seasoned detective assumed the rôle of both father and mother to the girl, and long before the case came to a conclusion he realized that she was both good and unspoiled, and worthy of the love of Barry Caldwell.

In the meantime he made a careful survey of the apartment which was furnished with exquisite taste. There was a living room, a bedroom and a bath. All communicated, and the only entrance was from the door

leading into the corridor of the hotel. He doubted Caldwell's story, and yet he dreaded the consequences of putting that doubt to the test. It would be a shame if anything happened to this fragile little woman.

The evidence of her natural love for the beautiful was on all sides. The little water colors evidently reflected her personal likes. Books filled the cases built into the wall, and over the transom of the door to the next apartment was a lithograph of "Washington Crossing the Delaware." In the center Washington looked down on them with a sort of leer. What had caused such a change in the naturally serene countenance of the Father of his Country? Almost instantly Peabody Smith understood the cause. Some one had poked out the eye of the man who was first in war and peace. Probably a careless chambermaid. It was the one note of untidiness in the cultured atmosphere of the room.

For more than an hour the detective remained and talked with the girl, and when he left finally she was not only composed, but there was an instinctive understanding between them. She knew that he was her friend. Before he quit the house Peabody Smith had interviewed the elevator operator, the hall boy and everybody likely to know anything about the strange tragedy. Their stories, as is usually the case, were confusing and contradictory. Out on the sidewalk he met the policeman who patrolled the beat. He stopped and talked with him.

Officer Kelly was in a communicative mood. He had heard the shot in the third story of the Baldwin. He remembered the hour. It was a few minutes after five. He fixed the time because he had called up on the telephone to make his regular report to the station house. That was five o'clock and it could not have been more than a minute or two afterward when he heard the report of the revolver. He was not sure where it had come from, but he did notice that almost immediately a young man had run into the doorway of the Baldwin. Could he describe him? Certainly. Habit had taught him to impress such things on his mind. He remembered his size and how he was dressed. As he finished, Peabody Smith gasped for breath.

The description of the man who had run into the hotel tallied exactly with the appearance of Barry Caldwell.

That could mean only one thing—Barry Caldwell had gone into the room of Mary Kayne after Howard Harper was murdered.

Patrolman Kelly recalled other details, but they were of no importance. Officer Farley had come along at that moment and had gone into the house to investigate.

"Farley," commented the other, "always was a butinski." He thought there was a chance for a little personal glory, so he had taken charge of things. Kelly was satisfied, and he had gone on patroling his beat as usual.

The coroner's inquest the next day did not bring forth any additional evidence. Indeed, it was conducted in a perfunctory way. Barry Caldwell confessed to firing the shot that killed Howard Harper, and the officials felt that it was a waste of time to dig down very deep. No one seemed to regret the death of the man about town. He was a bounder, if ever there was one. The only thing he considered was his own pleasure and amusement. If he obtained that, it made little difference who suffered. In the last few months he had been intimate with half a dozen foolish girls. The last one was Sue Brown, a pretty young woman who was working as an "extra" in one of the moving picture studios on Long Island. They led the gay life for weeks. Finally she was found dead in her room one morning. The doctor who performed the autopsy declared that she had died from acute alcoholism. Everybody accepted the verdict except a good-for-nothing brother of the girl. Tom Brown asserted, with vehemence, that Harper was responsible for the death of his sister. But he was a dope fiend, in the last stages of tuberculosis and no one paid any attention to him. And then, in the natural order of things, the incident was forgotten.

After that Harper had begun to pursue Mary Kayne with his attentions. All of the evidence went to show that she made every effort to avoid him. She was not his kind, and he was exceedingly distasteful to her. She had real talent and it was her ambition to do something worth while in the spoken drama. Then she met Barry

Caldwell, and it proved to be a case of love at first sight. Caldwell, with one or two successes to his credit, was anxious to give her a vehicle that would serve her peculiar ability. They met frequently, and during that time Harper had been more than usually persistent in pressing his attentions on the girl. Caldwell was furious, and on one particular night, in the presence of witnesses, he had taken an oath that if Harper did not keep away from Miss Kayne he would be sorry.

"Don't misunderstand me," he cried in his quiet and yet passionate way. "If you put a finger on that girl I'll kill you!"

Even without his confession this evidence would have been fatal to Barry Caldwell, and Peabody Smith learned of it with a sinking heart. The one thing in favor of the dramatist was what the detective had gleaned from Patrolman Kelly. Through his evidence it would be possible to prove that Caldwell had not been in the room when the fatal shot was fired. But if Caldwell were innocent, what about the girl? The thought made Smith shudder. He hesitated to make use of his knowledge. For the time being, at least, he would keep it to himself.

In the privacy of his room he made a careful examination of the revolver that had been handed him by the dramatist. As Caldwell had said, one shot had been fired from the weapon. In the meantime the physician of the coroner made an autopsy on the body of Howard Harper and located the bullet. His official report had been filed, and one afternoon the detective made it his business to read it. One sentence in this document gave him a new thrill.

Dr. Forbes testified that the shot which killed Harper had been fired from a twenty-eight caliber revolver; and the bullet was there to prove what he said. That would have been comparatively uninteresting if it had not been for one most important fact.

The revolver which Barry Caldwell passed to the detective—the weapon with which he said he had committed the deed—was a thirty-two caliber. When this bit of information sank into the mind of the detective he sat down in order to recover from his astonishment. With this evidence and the testimony of Patrolman Kelly he had it in his power to secure the release of the young dramatist.

His first impulse was to go and lay the facts before Caldwell. But what would be the result? How would it be possible to tell him that his story was a fabrication? In the end he did go to see Caldwell in his cell; but he did not tell him all he knew. Instead he skirted around the facts in the effort to have some new light thrown on the situation.

"Barry," he said gently, "don't you think that in your excitement you might have been mistaken in what you told me?"

Caldwell looked at him out of his cold gray eyes. There was a trace of anger in his face as he replied:

"Peabody, if you are a friend of mine you will accept my story and not try to dispute it. I was not in the least excited. I knew exactly what I was saying. I'll tell you something further for your own information: I bought that revolver for the express purpose of killing Howard Harper. He was a beast, and I was firmly convinced that the world would be better off with him out of it. I had warned him time and again not to annoy Miss Kayne. He paid no attention to my warnings.

"That afternoon I learned that he was going to her apartment, and I knew that he was going for no good purpose. He had been drinking heavily, and he told several persons that he was infatuated with the girl. He said that he was going to compel her to love him, and that if she refused that he would get her anyhow. When I heard that, things went red with me. I put the revolver in my pocket, jumped into a taxicab, and hurried to her apartment. I saw a light in her room from the street, and the elevator boy told me that Harper had just gone up and had been admitted by her. I don't know how I got there. I remember nothing except that he was there. Some one said they had heard screams coming from the room. She was crying hysterically when I broke in. The rest you know."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" asked the detective sharply.

Barry Caldwell made a gesture of weariness.

"What's the use of going over this again and again? Haven't I told you that I wanted to protect the reputation of the girl? I've confessed the crime. In the name of God, what more do you want?"

For the first time since he was placed under arrest, the dramatist showed signs of breaking down. His face was white and haggard and there was the suspicion of tears in his eyes. The detective was no novice in crime. He was accustomed to unusual sights, but this emotion on the part of the young man of whom he was very fond affected him deeply. He patted him on the back affectionately.

"It is all right, Barry," he said. "Everything will come out all right in the wash. And in the meantime believe me that I am only thinking of your own good."

"If that is true," retorted Caldwell with asperity, "you will let me alone. And whatever you do, I don't want you to drag this little girl into the thing any further."

II.

It was on a dull Monday afternoon that Peabody Smith made his way to the apartment of Mary Kayne, with the intention of laying his discoveries before her. How should he approach the girl? How suggest his suspicions without seeming to be antagonistic? The answer to both these questions came from the girl herself, suddenly, unexpectedly and spontaneously.

"Oh, Mr. Smith," she cried, the moment he entered the room, taking him by the lapels of his coat and looking into his face with streaming eyes, "I can't stand the strain any longer. I've got to tell you the truth—what I've been wanting to tell you from the very start. Barry Caldwell is no more guilty of this murder than you are. He is absolutely innocent."

Peabody smiled down at her in a fatherly manner.

"Mary, I'm glad to hear you say that. You confirm what I have suspected from the outset."

Thereupon he proceeded to explain the discoveries he had made; the testimony of Patrolman Kelly, which proved that Caldwell could not have been in the room at the time the shot was fired; and the discrepancy in the caliber of the bullet and the revolver from which it was alleged to have been fired.

Mary Kayne listened to all of this patiently, nodding her head from time to time.

"Of course," she said, "you could prove that he was not guilty, but aside from that everybody must know that he never had anything to do with the death of Howard Harper."

Peabody Smith laughed.

"I must say that I like your confidence. It must be fine to inspire such loyalty in any girl. But, my dear, we are only half through with the business. We can go to the authorities and demand the release of Barry Caldwell on the ground that he is innocent. Very good. What will they say? They will want to know who is guilty."

She smiled at him through her tears.

"That will be the easiest part of the affair."

Peabody Smith was not smiling now. His brows were wrinkled and hundreds of crows' feet seemed to be forming around the corners of his eyes.

"Do—do you mean to say that you can tell me the name of the person who killed Harper?"

She nodded her pretty head with emphasis.

"Who did it, then?" cried the detective.

She sat down, looked at him intently and said quietly:

"I did it—I shot Howard Harper."

Peabody Smith just stood there staring at her. What she said was what he had half expected, and yet it seemed too unreal for belief. He had fought the notion of Barry Caldwell being a murderer, and now he mentally tried to acquit the girl. But she did not give him the faintest foundation on which to base his conviction. She related all that occurred down to the smallest detail, and she concluded by going to a drawer and bringing forth a pearl-handled revolver.

"Barry came in right after it happened. He saw Harper lying dead on the floor,

and he fixed the thing with his unerring dramatic instinct. He threw this revolver in the drawer where it has lain ever since. Then he emptied one of the cartridges out of his own revolver, and after the policeman rushed into the room called you on the telephone and told you he had killed a man. The rest you know. It was like him to want to save me at the cost of his own life, but I can't let him make the sacrifice."

The detective scarcely listened to what she was saying. Somehow it seemed like a twice-told tale. All the time she was speaking he was thinking of how he was going to save her from her folly.

He must make her promise to keep quiet until he had time to collect his wits. He would tell her he was going to consult with Barry Caldwell—anything to keep her mouth closed until he had formulated a plan of campaign. His eyes roved around the walls of the room. Presently they rested on the unframed lithograph of "Washington Crossing the Delaware." As on the first time he looked at it, he thought of how incongruous it appeared amid the dainty water colors and the other artistic gems. The Father of His Country had a rather sheepish appearance, as though he had been out all night and was rather doubtful of the kind of reception he would get when he returned home. Again Peabody Smith noticed the hole in the eye of Washington. What could have caused it? With the question a flood of light seemed to stream in on his mind. He glanced at the opposite wall and beheld a disfigured spot on the paper.

"Let me see that revolver!" he exclaimed suddenly; and before she could reply he had snatched it from her hand.

He examined it nervously, then he ran around the room, looking at the furniture and feeling of the wall paper. The place where it had been torn bore the mark of a bullet. Some of the fine plaster was still on the floor behind a rug. All the time he was going through this performance Peabody Smith kept turning and looking up at the engraving of Washington.

Mary Kayne wondered if he was taking leave of his senses. His antics made her forget her own tragedy for the time being. The detective acted like a man who is on the eve of a great discovery. The melancholy of his face was gone; no longer did he resemble a funeral director on duty. Instead he smiled as though an idea had unexpectedly illuminated his mind and was being reflected in his countenance.

"Do you," he said, grasping Mary by the wrist, "remember the man that I passed in the hallway when I came to this room in answer to the telephone call from Barry Caldwell?"

She shook her head, surprised.

"This is the first time I heard of any man," she replied.

"There was one," he retorted impatiently. "I thought I spoke of it at the time. Perhaps they may recall it at the desk. I'll go down and see. I do not know when I'll get back. Not until I've run this thing down. In the meantime give me your word of honor that you won't go out—that you won't speak to any one about this matter until I see you again."

"I promise," she said, and although she spoke in a quiet, conversational tone, he knew that he could place implicit confidence in what she said.

He rushed out of the room like a man possessed, and she sank back into an easy chair with the air of one who is physically exhausted. Strangely enough, they seemed to have changed places. The movie star, by all rights, under the circumstances, should have been agitated and wringing her hands, and wondering what would be the consequences of her confession. Instead of that, she felt just tired and was experiencing a sort of relief in having got the dreadful secret off her mind. Peabody Smith, one the other hand, might have been expected to be calm and cold and stoical; but he was as excited as a young detective on his first important case.

He found the chief clerk on the lower floor, and for some minutes he was engaged in active conversation with the man. He was asking questions—dozens of them—and the other was replying or nodding his head. Presently they hurried upstairs together and rushed into the room adjoining the apartment of Miss Kayne. When they came out Peabody Smith was more excited than when he went in. He hastened down-

stairs and, going into a telephone booth, called up police headquarters. He told them what he wanted in quick, choppy sentences.

"Yes," he concluded, "send out a general alarm. The chances are that you will locate him in some hospital. Yes, tuberculosis. That's the idea. Please let me know the moment you get a tip. Yes, I'll be on tap any hour of the day or night."

Peabody Smith never worked harder than he did during the next eighteen hours. He did not have more than two or three hours' sleep, and he hardly snatched enough food to satisfy his hunger. But late the next afternoon found him at the door of Mary Kayne's apartment, white and disheveled, but with his smoldering eyes filled with expectancy.

"Get your things on in a hurry," he exclaimed. "We are bound for a little hospital down on Long Island. We haven't a minute to spare. I'm hoping and praying that we are in time. Come, don't stand there staring at me. Put your hat on and come along."

She knew better than to question him. In a few minutes they were in front of the Baldwin, getting into a taxicab. Peabody gave the driver the directions, and they were soon on their way. The detective was singularly quiet and morose, only moving to look out of the window occasionally and to mutter something about the way they were crawling along. It was dark when they reached the hospital, and they hurried into the main entrance. In the wide hallway, with the bare, polished floors, he found the resident physician waiting for them.

"What's the verdict?" asked Peabody in a hushed voice. "Is he still alive? Can we see him?"

"Yes," was the reply to both questions, "but you haven't reached here a minute too soon. He—he's hardly fit to talk."

"But the life of a man—or a woman—may depend on it. Can't you see? Otherwise I wouldn't dream of disturbing him."

The physician nodded understandingly, and the next moment they were being ushered into a ward, and next to a cot with screens all around it. On his back lay the wreck of a man—a sallow-faced, hollow-eyed man with a hunted look in his eyes. Something like a smile flitted into these as Peabody Smith edged into the narrow inclosure. The detective greeted him, and then summoned a police officer who had been lingering on the other side of the room.

"Where's your stenographer?" whispered the detective to the officer.

For reply the patrolman pointed to a young man seated at the foot of the cot in front of a little table. A book lay before him, and he held a sharpened pencil poised in mid-air. Mary Kayne, who was on the other side of the patient, noticed the chart hanging from the post on the cot, and she saw that it bore the name of Tom Brown. Like a flash it came across her mind that this was the brother of Sue Brown, the girl whose life had been wrecked by Howard Harper.

"I got him, all right," whispered the man on the cot. "A life for a life!"

A paroxysm of coughing succeeded this outburst; then when he had quieted down a bit the man continued:

"I'll—I'll have to make it short. I—I can't say much more. That night I followed him to the Baldwin. I saw him go into Miss Kayne's apartment. The next room happened to be vacant, and the door was open. I crept in there. You may remember there was a closed door between the two apartments. It had a transom over it, and I could see the light shining through a lithograph that was tacked over the transom. I got a ladder and climbed up, and poked my finger through the lithograph so that I could see everything that was going on. That—that beast was hugging Miss Kayne, and she was crying and scratching and pulling away from him. She did get away, and then she grabbed a little revolver off the bureau, and, pointing it at him, fired. It missed him and hit the opposite wall. She didn't know that, because she fell, half fainting, on the floor. He started for her again—and then I fired—and—and shot him dead. I slipped out during the excitement, passed Mr. Caldwell in the hall—and that's all."

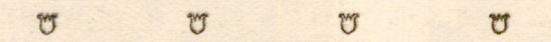
It *was* all. Tom Brown, derelict and avenger, had gone on his last long journey.

Mary Kayne, crying gently, was being led out of the room by Peabody Smith. The white-capped nurse closed Brown's eyes to the world, and the screens were silently placed around the death cot. The curtain had fallen on another tragedy of everyday life.

It was not until Barry Caldwell had been released, and the young man had folded Mary Kayne in his arms in that fateful apartment, that Peabody Smith considered his task done. Willingly he agreed to be the best man at their wedding, but as he left them he threw out his word of warning.

"You are all right, both of you, but in your business you must remember that reputation is a thing worth keeping. You know what old Josh Billings says on that point: 'Reputation is like money—we never have a true idea of its value until we lose it.'"

Next Week: "THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW PATH."



COMPARATIVE ANATOMY

HERE I sit in silent bliss,
Dewy eve till nearly morn,
Thinking of the things I miss
Like trolley gong and blatant horn.
Here 'tis fine to be alone
With leavy bower and carpet green,
Regretting nothing that is shown
On cities' stage or silver screen.
Here I summon forth my soul
To seek communion with the Power
That causes ocean's surge to roll
And clothes with grandeur every hour
I spend on Compton's rugged coast
Far from cities' dusts and clangs
The land that was the Pilgrim's boast
Now cluttered up with fishing gangs
Whose occupation most aquatic,
Always seems to danger nigh;
Whose nets become darned aromatic
Spread upon the fields to dry.
I love to watch the golfing hound
Perform with driver, mashie, putter
O'er seven miles of close-cropped ground
To land his spheroid in a gutter.
With aspect dark and visage grim,
He whangs away with skillful brassie,
But as for me—I'd rather be
In shady nook with Bonnie Lassie.

Ernest P. Gladding.

Above Suspicion

By ROBERT ORR CHIPPERFIELD

CHAPTER XII.

GEOFF OFFERS A SUGGESTION.

CONSOLIDATED LEAD! The name rang in Geoff's ears while he fed the dogs and the mare, performed his ablutions and prepared a supper for which he all at once discovered that he had no appetite.

It held no significance for Dr. Hood. He had not heard Robbins's story that day of the pitiful suicide of the young embezzler, Lawrence Shirley, and the curious coincidence of its date and that of his financial crash with those of the anonymous letters.

Geoff sat down with his pipe on the porch steps to await the honk of the doctor's car from the road, thankful for the respite afforded him to ponder over what he had learned that day and make up his mind how much he would disclose. If he were mixed up in the investigation willy-nilly and couldn't quit, as Doc Hood himself had insisted, then there were some points in it he meant to work out in his own way.

His thoughts wandered, however, to William Dunn's inexplicable refusal of Benkard's bequest to him. The man was broken in health. It was easy to see that his days of usefulness to any other employer would be numbered even if he could succeed in obtaining a new position. Twenty-five thousand would have meant security for a future that appeared none too bright.

That was a problem, however, which must be left to the future. Geoff himself could see only a step or two ahead of him on the path he had chosen, but as he reflected those few steps became as plain as though a searchlight had been thrown across them. By the time the wheezing cough of the car sounded over the meadow his decision was made.

"We're late," the doctor announced as they rattled off down the road. "Sim Perkins ran a nail in his foot some days ago and he's got a pretty bad case of blood poisoning."

"That ornery cuss' blood has allus been p'isened," commented Geoff. "Didn't he

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 11.

turn that mare out to die after overworkin' her for nigh onto sixteen year? I found her flounderin' round in that first big snowstorm last winter and took her home. It's funny he ain't sent for you afore this if it's some days since he got hurt, for he's precious careful o' his own hide."

"There's something funnier yet about it. He says he stepped on a piece of driftwood while he was wading around on the shore, but he wouldn't tell me just how long ago it was; says he forgets. What do you suppose he was doing down there?"

"Snoopin' round somebuddy's boathouse, likely, to see what he could pick up. Dunno when he ain't thievin'."

Geoff dismissed the reprobate with a shrug.

"Time to turn the lights on, doc? It's mighty dark 'long here."

"I guess it's safe enough now," the doctor responded. "Whatever took you to the city to-day? It wasn't some notion you got about Lane, was it?"

"I wanted to see a feller that works for Mr. Ashe, young Rupert's father." Geoff's reply was conscientiously literal. "I picked up more'n a little, one way and another, 'bout Lane and Benkard to-day, but I'll tell it to you when we see what this detective from headquarters has found out. I got a sort o' s'pission, but I may be dead wrong and I ain't goin' to git myself mixed up in this business worse'n I be!"

Dr. Hood glanced sidewise at his companion, but the rugged, homely face was set and determined in the dim glow from the lamps and he knew better from past experience than to pursue the subject further. Geoff would unbosom himself in his own good time and not a minute before.

The ancient car rattled and creaked, but gathered speed. The tilled fields gave place to pasture land and stretches of woods with here and there a dark and silent farmhouse.

The distance seemed interminable, but the picnic grove was reached at last. They had scarcely pulled in under the shed when a figure advanced as before to meet them.

"'Evening, doctor. I was beginning to think you and your friend here couldn't make it."

The voice of Detective Lyons spoke from the dense blackness.

"Sorry I haven't got anything to report except where our man *wasn't* last Wednesday night. I've checked up on every friend and associate of his that I could locate. From the time he left that garage at Brooklands until he drove into his own in town he seems to have dropped off the face of the earth.

"There's just one point, though; he wasn't riding around very much. I saw the garage helper again at the Cavendish, the one who gave me the first straight dope on him, and he says that if Lane stocked up full with gas and oil at about the distance Brooklands is from the city—I didn't give him the name of the burg, of course, only the approximate number of miles—there wasn't but a little more used up than would bring him in. The water in the radiator wasn't even hot.

"That looks as though Lane had driven straight to New York and the car had been standing somewhere not any great distance from the garage for a good part of those four hours. I'll get the goods on him yet, though, if you'll give me a little more time. You couldn't give me any further lead on him, could you, sir? We're wise to why he and Benkard quarreled, of course, but it might help some more if we knew what brought them together last year when they'd been enemies for so long."

"I haven't been able to find anybody who could tell me that, Lyons, and I can't offer you any suggestions," Dr. Hood said and added shrewdly: "Perhaps Geoff Peters can, though; he knows more of what's been going on around the Cayley place than I do."

"I ain't been nigh it to-day." Geoff paused. "This afternoon I went to see that rich widow lady that's bought the big Durant estate over to Silver Bay; Mrs. Van Wert her name is. She wants me to put up some statoos for her round the grounds."

"Has that got anything to do with the case?" demanded the doctor as Lyons moved impatiently.

"I kinder thought it might have, seein's she's tryin' to git into society and knows Lane and the Cayleys and Benkard pretty

well," drawled Geoff. "It was at a house party she give last summer that Lane met Miss Millie, and I had a kind o' idee mebbe the little gal had somethin' to do with the beginnin' o' the friendship between him and her uncle, same as she had with the bustin' o' it up, and that she wasn't no more to blame for one than t'other.

"I'd figgered it out that if Benkard hadn't needed Lane in his business he wouldn't have made up with him and he'd have told him to go to blazes when he come sparkin' the niece. Now, this here Mrs. Van Wert would do most anythin' to git took up by the big bugs, and if Benkard had baited his hook for Lane with little Miss Millie I wanted to find out if Mrs. Van Wert held the rod a puppose."

"Did you?" Lyons asked quickly, with a new respect in his tone. "I don't know how you doped all that out, but it seems like the straight goods to me. Had this dame been acting as capper for Benkard? How'd you get her going?"

"Well, I let on to the feller that buttles for her when I sent in my name that I couldn't come before because I'd been workin' at the Cayley place, so she was all fixed for gossip when he took me to her. I give it to her, too; I've told more lies to-day than I'll likely be able to live down the rest o' my life!" Geoff chuckled.

"I kinder made out that Miss Millie had took me into her confidence, bein' as how I'd worked round their old house summer after summer since she was a little gal. I 'lowed she was grievin' 'cause Lane had seemed to be sort o' coolin' off to'ards her after her uncle's death, but that she'd told me Mis' Van Wert would help her to git him back, that she'd interdooced 'em in the beginnin' and had made the match. Mis' Van Wert swallered it like it was candy and said it was true and she would do anything for the dear child. Then I let her drag it out o' me after a lot more coaxin' that folks were sayin' Lane blamed her for gittin' him in so deep with Benkard through her society inflooence that when she presented his niece and he saw Benkard wanted him to marry her he had to fall in with the idee or Benkard would wipe him out down on that there Stock Exchange."

"Great Jehosaphat!" the doctor exploded. "Where'd you ever get such a notion, Geoff?"

"Didn't git it nowheres," Geoff responded artlessly. "I was baitin' a little hook o' my own, and Mis' Van Wert riz right to it. Afore she stopped to think she said that Lane didn't even know Miss Millie was Benkard's niece till he was head over heels in love with her, and that she and Benkard had fixed it up between 'em.

"Then she kinder recollected she was just talkin' to a country workman, and a gabby one at that, and she shut up like a clam, but I'd found out what I wanted to know. 'Zeppa, the cook at the Cayley place, had a'ready told me how partial Benkard was to remindin' Miss Millie and her ma o' what they owed to him, and you said yourself, doc, that after the readin' o' the will this afternoon the little gal 'lowed she was grateful to her uncle's mem'ry for all he'd done for her even though she knew the motive.

"I kinder figgered it out that Benkard never did nothin' for nobuddy without makin' it pay him in the end, one way or 'nother, and that he'd only brung Mis' Cayley and her daughter on from the home town six years ago because he thought his sister would be a help in gittin' into society, the sort o' society that would further his Wall Street schemes. Then when he seen how purty Miss Millie was he had her eddicated and groomed just like one o' these here trained hosses at the county fair so's when she was old 'nough to git married he'd fix it that it would be to somebuddy who'd be the greatest help o' all to him.

"Lane must 'a' been the feller he needed most now to have with him and not ag'in' him in some mighty big deal he was a-plannin', so him and Mis' Van Wert put their heads together. The little gal herself, though, didn't take to the idee and it must have s'prised him a lot. Reckon she's 'bout the only livin' critter he ain't been able to git the whip hand over somehow. Anyway, last Wednesday night it looks to me as though she give Lane his answer good and plenty, and he seen how he'd been played for a sucker like he said, and the game was up."

For a moment after he had unburdened himself of his lengthy explanation neither of Geoff's auditors offered a comment. Then Detective Lyons spoke.

"And you're carpentering and mixing concrete out here in the sticks! Say, Peters, let me take you to the old man at headquarters and he'll put you right into the bureau! You'd make one of the best dicks on the force! One word to him about what you've done—"

"Ain't done nothin'!" Geoff interrupted in alarmed haste. "I work at my trade and I aim to mind my own business, only I kinder got mixed up in this through Doc Hood."

"You called the turn on this friendship between Lane and Benkard that has kept the whole financial world guessing for almost a year!" Lyons exclaimed, adding generously: "I'm an old hand at the game, but you've beaten me to a frazzle so far on the case. You've established the motive—"

"But there ain't a speck o' real evidence yet to show Lane done the murder, nor where he was."

There was a shade of repression in Geoff's tone, however, and the trained ears of the detective were not deaf to it.

"You've got another one of those hunches of yours, though, Peters! What's the idea?"

"'Tain't a hunch exactly."

Geoff took off his cap and scratched his head.

"I went to the city this mornin' on a little business o' my own and I never realized afore how all-fired big 'tis! I a'most got lost, and I reckon folks could live there for their hull lives and you'd never hear tell o' 'em down at your headquarters if they didn't do somethin' ag'in' the law or have it done to 'em. Seems to me 'twould be like looking for a needle in a haystack if you was to try to find just one lady, even though she did have a kinder funny name that you wouldn't forgit easy."

"'A lady'!" Dr. Hood repeated, amazed.

"Who's the woman?" Lyons demanded. "What's her name?"

"Well, I ain't got no idee that she's mixed up in this case herself, no more'n the thousands o' folks who could 'a' read 'bout it in the papers," Geoff replied cautiously. "I was just wonderin' whether you'd ever heard tell o' a lady named Dawn—Zoey Dawn."

"Zoe Dawn?" The detective laughed.

"She hasn't any police record, if that's what you mean, but up to two or three years ago she managed to keep herself pretty well in the public eye without trying to. The spotlight was the last thing in the world she wanted. There are different reports about her, some that she came from a fine old Southern family and others that she drifted East from the Barbary Coast. I got a flash at her once when she came down to headquarters to identify a diamond necklace which had been stolen from her, and she's some queen! But what made you ask about her, Peters?"

"I was kinder cur'us to know what she looked like. How did she git afore the public? Seems to me I heard tell she wasn't in what you might call society."

"Not so you'd notice it since the last scandal! It was about four years ago when she came to headquarters and she might have been thirty then, though she didn't look it; a magnificently formed woman, big, like a statue, but not coarse. She had masses of red-brown hair as natural as her complexion, and great hazel eyes with a reckless, laughing devil in them.

"It was her voice as much as her beauty that must have made some of the biggest men in the country fall for her; it was deep and soft and rich, with a note like a bell." Lyons paused. "I don't get any possible connection between her and this case; politics was her game, played from the inside and for big stakes. She only came to New York when Washington got too hot for her and certain foreign powers threatened communication with our State Department."

"I don't read nothin' but our *Weekly Clarion,* so she might be the Queen o' Sheby for all I'd 'a' heard tell," remarked Geoff. "Just give me a general idee o' what she done and where she is now."

"As I remember she blew into Washington about eight years ago as a rich young widow. She was well supplied with money, had a smart little establishment and plenty of servants and managed without making

any stir at first to edge in with the political and diplomatic set. She was a mystery, but no one could get anything on her until a certain South American envoy committed suicide because she refused him; she had kept him dangling after her so closely that his mission here failed, but nobody could connect her in any way with those who opposed it.

"Then a bill was rushed through the Senate when the man who had been put in office to kill it was idling in her drawing-room. After a few more little things like that an ambassador from a European country went dippy about her, and some tremendously valuable documents disappeared. He was recalled and the affair hushed up, but it was then that she moved to New York and lived very quietly, without a breath of personal scandal. She dropped out of the newspapers except for that jewel robbery and nothing more has been heard of her for two or three years, as I said. I'll have to get in touch with our Secret Service to locate her; they will have kept her under observation, of course."

"There ain't nothin' in all that ag'in' her moral character so far as I kin see." Geoff had listened carefully to every word. "Them foreigners and that fool Senator may have lost their heads over her, but that was their own lookout, and if she got a nice little rake-off for gummin' their games 'tain't been proved. She lived proper and respectable, you say?"

"Sure. That was part of her tactics. I never heard of her falling for any of the big guys who forgot their careers for her. But let's get down to business. What's she got to do with either Benkard or Lane? You've got something up your sleeve, Peters, or you'd never have spoken of her. Come clean and give me the straight dope."

"'S far as I know she ain't got nothin' to do with either o' 'em," Geoff disclaimed, but he added with a chuckle: "If this here Secret Service has 'a' been keepin' an eye on her, though, they'll likely be able to tell you somethin' I couldn't that might s'prise you, and if she don't live any too far from Lane's garage and he didn't come back here that night, after all, and so ain't the man we're lookin' for, I got a kinder notion it might've been in front o' her house, or nigh it, that his car stood most o' them four missin' hours."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WOMAN SCORNED.

GEOFF completed his work on the Cayley garage before noon the next day and was cleaning up the litter when he saw Adrian Middleton drive up to the door in the big car which had brought the veiled lady on the previous Saturday. After an interval spent in replacing his tools in the huge box on the terrace Middleton himself came out to him, accompanied by Miss Vera Sherwood.

"Hello, Geoff! Your work here is very nearly finished, isn't it? I've come out to ask you when you can attend to the repairs on our old place."

He shook hands heartily.

"When I told my sister-in-law about you she said she wouldn't dream of having anybody else and we're living with a leaky roof, shaky chimneys and a court that needs a new concrete floor to replace the old brick one."

"I'll be there soon's I kin git away, Mr. Middleton," Geoff promised. "Got to set the doodabs on this terrace railing first and one thing and 'nother, but I won't keep you folks a-waitin' more'n a few days. 'Mornin', Miss Sherwood."

"Good morning, Geoffrey—and good-by," she smiled. "My visit here is ended and I am going now to Mrs. Harper Middleton's, but I'll see you there and I'll tell her what splendid work you have accomplished here at Mrs. Cayley's."

"Thank you, ma'am," he responded respectfully. "I ain't up to some o' them fancy city builders' tricks, but I aim to do as good as I know how."

"I am sure you do."

She smiled again, Adrian nodded, and they were gone.

When the bustle of leave-taking in the patio had subsided and the hum of the car diminished down the drive Geoff took his paper-wrapped package of lunch from beneath his folded coat. Dipper in hand, he

started for the willow-fringed brook in the pasture on the adjoining estate. He had no desire to encounter Sergeant Eliot of the district attorney's forces and still less to be interviewed just then by little Miss Millie, unprepared as he was to explain to her his misrepresentations of the previous day should Mrs. Van Wert have communicated with her.

Besides, he wanted to think in peace and quiet. After they separated from Detective Lyons the night before Dr. Hood had pestered him with questions concerning the source of his information about the woman Zoe Dawn. He was not at all certain he had succeeded in convincing the shrewd medical examiner that he had told all he knew.

His suggestion in regard to Lane's possible interview with the Dawn woman on the night of the murder had been a mere shot in the dark based upon a course of reasoning wholly his own. Having offered it to Lyons for what it was worth it had ceased to be his business. Lane's bluff in refusing an alibi had been characteristic of the man and that, too, did not trouble Geoff's thoughts.

As he had told Adrian Middleton, his own work at the Cayley place would soon be finished and he would no longer have an excuse to linger in the vicinity. The Corners was a far cry from the scene of the crime. While the authorities remained at sea as to the identity of the murderer he felt loath to leave the center of their activities where he could at least be an unobtrusive bystander and keep in touch with Doc Hood. If he could contrive a way to prolong his duties without the dishonesty of accepting pay for unnecessary work, and from a lone widow woman, at that—

His thoughts were rudely interrupted when he reached the brook among the willows by finding another there before him; a frail, solitary, stoop-shouldered figure, who sat with thin hands clasped listlesly about his knees and faded eyes staring straight before him.

Geoff coughed uncomfortably, then bent forward and filled his dipper with the sparkling water. As he straightened and turned to retreat the other spoke.

"Good morning, Geoffrey. Were you going to eat your lunch here? Don't let me disturb you; I must go and pack my bag shortly, anyway."

"'Mornin', Mr. Dunn," Geoff responded. "If I won't bother you I'll set right here and eat. You thinkin' o' runnin' up to the city?"

"I am leaving Sunny Beach," the secretary observed, as though voicing a statement to himself. "I can be of no further service to Mrs. Cayley and I must clean out my old desk in the Broad Street office to-morrow before its doors are closed."

He remained seated, blinking at the glare of sunlight on the narrow, rippling stream, and Geoff ventured:

"S'pose you'll take a little rest afore tacklin' somethin' new? It 'll be kinder hard, gittin' in with different folks' ways after 'sociation' so long with Mr. Benkard."

"'Something new'?" Dunn repeated vaguely. "I—I have no idea. Perhaps I shall take a rest—a long rest. I have often planned what I should do when this—when my late position expired and I felt very courageous, but now that it has come I find that my plans do not seem feasible. My thoughts turn backward; I cannot look to the future."

"It's the shock, mebbe." Geoff chewed ruminatively on his sandwich. There was something in the level, unemotional tones of the secretary which gave him the creeps, and his worn, lined face was pasty gray in the bright sunshine.

"You didn't have no intentions, then, o' stayin' for always with Mr. Benkard?"

"I should have been at his service as long as he needed me." The hands about his gaunt knees gripped tensely for an instant, but his low voice did not change. "However, I believed that he had other plans for the future in which I held no place and I suppose a man who has failed always dreams of coming back, at first, anyway. But the days pass, and the years, and sometimes he loses heart. He either plods along on the same old treadmill or—or else goes mad!"

His tones had dropped to a mere whisper, and Geoff glanced at him narrowly. He had shown no signs of madness, he had

plodded along contentedly enough under Benkard's instructions and authority and it seemed more than ever improbable that he would be able to strike out for himself and start anew, yet he had refused the legacy! What could be the meaning of it?

"I ain't got no idee o' that there Wall Street business, but I opine it would drive anybuddy crazy to watch them stocks go chasin' up and down like a chipmunk on a tree! 'Tain't any wonder some o' the young fellers lose their heads, 'specially when other folks' money is in their reach, and git to gamblin' with that as well as their own when the fever hits 'em," Geoff remarked.

"I heard tell o' one the other day who lost a lot that didn't belong to him and then killed himself in Mr. Benkard's own rooms after confessin' to him. Shirley, his name was. They say he was a fine, upstandin' young man, too, till he got to thinkin' he was bound to beat the game. It happened years ago afore you j'ined Mr. Benkard, and I don't s'pose you ever knowed him."

Dunn had straightened as though every nerve and muscle in his body were taut, and the vacant, introspective look in his dim eyes had given place to a stare of shrinking horror.

"Lawrence Shirley! Yes, I knew him. It was a hideous tragedy—hideous! But where could you have heard about it, Geoffrey? I thought it was buried and forgotten!"

His voice was shaking now, but Geoff replied in an offhand way:

"Two gentlemen in the train—strangers, they was—goin' out to Silver Bay, where I got a job waitin' for me, was talking 'bout Mr. Benkard's death and one thing and 'nother, and they spoke of him. Reckon they was speculators themselves and had knowed the young feller; leastways they recollected all 'bout the business.

"Seems to me one o' 'em said 'twas on New Year's Day ten year ago that Mr. Shirley killed himself, and t'other remarked it was a pity he hadn't gone to them whose money he'd used and made a clean breast o' it; that they'd 'a' helped him out and give him a chance for a fresh start, so's he could have paid back what he'd took. Both o' 'em agreed he was a splendid young man, only foolish, and then they switched to argufyin' over the market reports so I didn't pay no more attention, not knowin' nothin' 'bout stocks and sech. Was the poor young feller a friend o' yours, Mr. Dunn?"

But the erstwhile secretary had regained his composure, and he spoke apathetically once more.

"I had few friends; I knew him as I was acquainted with a score of young men who traded with us now and then, but he wasn't a steady customer. His death shocked me, of course, yet there have been many such—many such. I must pack now and arrange for a taxi to take me to the station. I am glad to have seen you again, Geoffrey, before I left. Good-by."

He held out his hand almost timidly, and Geoff, after wiping his greasy one on the newspaper, grasped it heartily. There was a look in the eyes of this shadow of a man which troubled his simple, kindly heart. The thought came to him that this was a sorry sort of leave-taking after years of faithful if possibly misguided service to a hard master.

"Good-by, Mr. Dunn, and good luck. When you git over this mebbe you'll find your plans workin' out fine. Hope you'll be comin' out this way agin some time."

Dunn shook his head, but the ghost of a smile flickered over his tired face and lingered as he turned away and started for the house.

Geoff threw his last crumbs to a catbird who hovered near, and then lighted his pipe. It was a day of departures. No one remained now except Mrs. Cayley, her daughter and the servants. He wished old Henry would get well and leave his room before his own work was completed; there was a question he wanted to ask him, but he could invent no excuse for venturing unbidden into the house. Sergeant Eliot seemed to have taken himself off, but that private detective must be hanging around somewhere. What could he be up to?

For the rest of the day he puttered about the terrace, seeing no one, but at nightfall when he returned to his own little cottage

he found a note thrust half out of sight beneath a flower pot on the steps. Ignoring for once the excited welcome of his canine companions, he unfolded the prescription blank and read laboriously the message scrawled in evident haste on its back.

DEAR GEOFF:
Come to my house quick as you can. Man we met last night wants to see you.
Yours truly,
EVANS HOOD.

So Lyons had lost no time in getting on the trail! Had he hit the nail on the head regarding this Zoey woman? She'd made gosh-almighty fools of senators and envoys and ambassadors, and Joseph Benkard, powerful as he had been, seemed small fry, after such big fish. But her name had been connected with his by a chosen few in Wall Street, and old Robbins had appeared to know what he was talking about.

Geoff fed the dogs, watered the mare, and after hastily making his toilet with the aid of a tin bucket and a comb he snatched a cold bite and struck off across the short cut to the village and the doctor's home on Main Street.

The latter admitted him and fairly dragged him into the little parlor and office combined. He found Detective Lyons pacing impatiently up and down.

"Look here, Peters, I don't know where you got your information, but it was on the level as far as it went. I want to ask you if you're holding out anything on us," the headquarters man began abruptly. "Dr. Hood says you've helped him a lot on another case or two out here, but you only did it in your own way.

"Sunny Beach was a village then, but it's part of New York City now, and that is a different matter. You needn't be afraid to speak because of getting mixed up in this, for you're not even a special deputy, and we'll keep you out of it; but if you're keeping back any dope that may be useful to us now, come across with it!"

"I ain't keepin' back nothin'!" Geoff asserted with dignity. "I ain't a dep'ty, as you say yourself, but a carpenter and mason, and I got a hull lot more work on my hands now than I kin 'tend to, even if I mind my own business, which I ain't been a doin'. There wasn't no call for me to tell Doc Hood, in the first place, what the cook had said 'bout the quarrel between Lane and Benkard, if I hadn't 'a' wanted to; but he's an old friend o' mine, and I didn't take to the browbeatin' airs o' that feller from the district attorney's office. I'm willin' and glad to help, but I ain't namin' no names unless I've a mind to!"

"Nobody's asking you to, Geoff." The fat little doctor backed him into a chair. "We just wanted you to tell us all you know in your own way, and what put you on the right track."

"Well"—Geoff deposited his cap on the floor beside him—"I heard tell o' a old gentleman who had friends down in that there Wall Street and kinder liked to gab 'bout what he picked up from 'em. It come to me there was one thing mebbe in Benkard's life nobuddy 'd thought to look into—wimmen. There ain't no man so wrapped up in money makin' and gittin' 'long in the world but what he's liable to let himself be sidetracked by some feemale critter or 'nother, and when they git to Benkard's age without ever philanderin' 'round they generally fall the hardest when it comes.

"Look at Lane! Look at that senator and them foreign gov'mint rep'sentatives you told us 'bout last night yourself, mister! Now, I ain't heard tell o' Benkard ever bein' married or even keepin' steady company 'mongst the society folks, so it stood to reason that if he had 'a' been in love with somebuddy it 'd be the kind o' lady he'd keep quiet 'bout, and the quieter he kept the more whispers there'd be. That's the way I figgered it out, anyhow."

"Go on, Peters," the detective urged, as he paused.

"Well, it seemed to me that his Wall Street friends would have knowed, and if they did so would Lane, and I got the idee that the old gentleman I told you 'bout would 'a' heard tell o' the gossip if there was any, so I went to town yesterday mornin' and asked him, sayin' Doc Hood had sent me."

Geoff grinned at his friend's round, amazed countenance.

"Told you I'd done more lyin' than I could live down in a month o' Sundays! Sure 'nough, for the last two years or so Benkard's name had been connected with a lady's who wasn't in society, and the way the old gentleman said it was a plenty! There hadn't been no talk o' it, though, for some months back, which looked like a fallin' out. When I could git him to tell me the lady's name he said it like it was some kind o' epidemic—Zoey Dawn.

"I hadn't heard o' her, but all the way back in the train I kept workin' it out in my own mind. Benkard was strong, and ten to one he was gittin' in too deep in whatever affair was between 'em, and had broke it off himself afore he let it master him. That meant bad blood and mebbe real hate on the woman's part, and a good notion to git even if she ever had the chance. Lane bein' so thick with him this past year would know it, and when he found he'd been used by Benkard and played for a sucker himself and wanted to ruin him, who'd be the first one he'd think o' to help him but the woman who'd been throwed down?"

"Geoff, how did you ever learn all that?" demanded the doctor.

"I mind my business as much as I kin, but when you've been workin' 'round folkses homes, inside and out, for high onto fifteen year, you git to knowin' things you'd never suspicion when your neighbors has their company manners on," Geoff responded modestly.

"Human nater's the same whether you're a city millionaire or a truck farmer, I reckon. A pretty woman might ketch the eye o' a feller like Benkard, but she'd have to be mighty smart and clever to make him keep on lookin'. If she was she'd soon find out his weak point and play on it. In his case 'twas ambition, and she'd prob'ly git him to believe she thought he was the greatest man in the world. That 'd flatter him so's he'd spread himself same's a turkey cock, 'specially in the beginnin' when he was real crazy over her, and to show her how wonderful he was there's no tellin' but he'd brag 'bout how he had worked some o' his biggest grabs and beat the other fellers, in the Lord knows what shady sort o' way.

"Wouldn't Lane think o' that, too? Rushin' away after the row that was the finish between 'em and vowin' to git Benkard afore he was crushed himself like so many other poor devils, wouldn't he recollect 'bout this Zoey woman on the way home and figger that if he could git her on his side she might tell him things which even them other Wall Street sharps didn't dream had been done to 'em?"

"You doped it out right again, Peters," remarked Lyons soberly. "The secret service has been keeping its eye on Zoe Dawn, as I told you they would. Benkard saw her at the races about three years ago, and got an introduction. He called at her apartments pretty regular for the next six months or so, and then all of a sudden she gave up her lease and bought a small house in a quiet neighborhood not half a mile from the Cavendish Garage. It was in front of her door that a car with Lane's license plate on it stood from before one o'clock until after three in the morning!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW WITNESS.

"THEN we've been barking up the wrong tree, after all!" Dr. Hood exclaimed. "It's mighty interesting about this woman, but it shows that Lane didn't kill Benkard, and my job is to find out who did. I wish you had told me when you first thought of this, Geoff; every day counts."

"There wasn't nothin' to tell," Geoff retorted. "Lane didn't kill Benkard, but mebbe the woman knows who did."

"She'll come across if she does," observed the detective grimly. "Her phone wires are tapped; every tradesman or messenger who goes to her door passes through the hands of a couple of our men first, and the house is being watched. It didn't take her long from past experience to get on to the fact that the authorities were interesting themselves in her once more, nor to guess the reason, and when I called she was all ready for me.

"Mr. Benkard, she said, had been a very good friend of hers and had advised her

concerning her real estate investments—she's got 'em, too; that's what most of her money is soaked away in—but she had not seen him for several months, and knew nothing about the murder until she was shocked by the account of it in the newspapers. He had never discussed his business affairs with her in any way, and she could not imagine what enemy he might or might not have had."

"Did you ask her about Lane?" The doctor had taken up his stand by the fireplace and now he began to polish his spectacles on the ancient lambrequin which covered the mantel.

"Sure I did!" Lyons nodded. "She admitted knowing him through Benkard's introduction, but couldn't recall when she had seen him last. She remembered fast enough, though, when I put her next that we were wise about Lane's car being outside Wednesday and had witnesses to prove the time he entered her house and left it.

"She's a clever woman—I'll hand that to her. I can see how easily she turned the heads of those politicians and diplomats in Washington when she laid herself out to fascinate 'em, without any of this vamp stuff, either. Was she feezed when she found we had her cornered and she'd made a slip? I'll say she wasn't! She just laughed that low, tinkling laugh of hers and held out her hands in a helpless sort of gesture.

"'Mr. Lane *was* here that night, and I did not care to mention it because of the lateness of the hour, although his call in itself was conventional enough,' she says. 'He telephoned from somewhere in the suburbs just before twelve and asked if he might drop in for a few minutes on his way home. I was lonely. I sometimes find him amusing, and on an impulse I granted him permission to call. We had a little supper, and during the course of the conversation which followed he remarked casually that he had dined at the country home of Mr. Benkard's sister on Long Island, and I remember observing then how long it was since I had seen him. That was the only time his name was mentioned, I think.'

"'What was it Mr. Lane had to see you about that was so important it couldn't wait till morning?' I asked her point-blank. She opened her eyes wide.

"'Nothing in the world. He was just restless—didn't feel like going home, and wanted a friendly chat. I have known Mr. Lane for several months, and I understand his moods. They are typical of men of large affairs who are under a continuous nervous strain. There must be a let-down, an hour or two now and then of complete mental relaxation, when they can forget the huge plans and problems which almost perpetually engross them in the congenial companionship of some one who is sympathetic, who comprehends. We talked about dozens of trivial, impersonal things until an ungodly hour, and I was really forced to send him home at last. He told me that I had done him a great deal of good.'

"Zoe Dawn had the nerve to tell me that, doctor, with an air of perfect frankness. I couldn't shake her story, though she must have been wise that we had the dope on her from Washington, anyway, even if we don't know yet just how serious the affair had been between her and Benkard. It was the bunk, of course, but I pretended to fall for it, arranged for her to be tailed wherever she went, and came down here to report to you. She hasn't tried once to get in touch with Lane nor he with her since I communicated with the secret service when I reached town and they began coöperating with us."

"Lane returned to the city late yesterday afternoon," the doctor observed thoughtfully. "At what time were the Dawn woman's phone wires first tapped and the house placed under observation?"

"By six o'clock this morning, before I'd even established from the private watchman on the block that any car had been standing in front of that particular house most of last Wednesday night from before one o'clock on. He's not so dumb, but he is an old man and afraid of losing his soft job. When I finally convinced him, though, that he wouldn't get in wrong he showed me a little notebook where he'd taken down the numbers of every car left out late at night on his beat, together with the date and the number of the house before which it stood. There was Lane's, right enough!"

The detective laughed. "That was luck, but to clinch it, he saw Lane himself come out of Zoe Dawn's house and drive away at a quarter past three. The methodical old cuss stopped under a street lamp and looked at his watch to make sure as the car rounded the corner. So much for Lane's actual presence there. That's an alibi that we've dug up for him whether he wants it or not, and it lets him out of the case. To-morrow, if you say so, doctor, I'll get Dawn down for a little talk with the old man at headquarters, and find out what really passed between the two of them that night, and all about her affair with Benkard. She won't find any kid-glove diplomacy about it, either. Want us to put her over the jumps?"

Dr. Hood glanced somewhat doubtfully at Geoff, who shook his head but remained silent.

"I don't know. I don't believe even your chief could get anything more out of the lady than you have, detective," the former replied tactfully. "How about it, Geoff?"

"'Tain't for me to say," remarked the reluctant consultant. "Reckon there's a good and sufficient reason why she ain't tried to git hold o' Lane, nor him her, but I kinder think if 'twas me runnin' this here business I'd go to her to-morrer mornin' and I'd lie considerable."

"What do you mean?" Lyons asked.

"Mebbe it 'd be more like takin' a chance than downright lyin', at that," Geoff amended. "Howsomever, I'd let on that Lane hearin' tell she'd 'stablished this alibi for him was goin' back on his bargain with her. I'd have to find out the name o' some real intimate Wall Street friend o' his that she'd recognize so's to make it sound as though it was straight goods when I said this friend had give him away to me; that Lane had told him he was just a goin' to flimflam her 'long till the murder was cleared up and the will probated, and then let her raise any fuss she'd a mind to.

"I'd hint kind o' broad, then, how Lane had laughed at the very idee o' her tellin' the truth 'bout what they'd settled between 'em last Wednesday night after she'd been tryin' so hard to live down them Washington doin's these last years, 'specially as if it come to a showdown he'd stick to the selfsame story she had give to Detective Lyons, and 'twould be his word ag'in' hers. When I'd got her to believin' it and madder 'n a wet hen, I'd leave."

"Leave?" repeated Lyons half incredulously. "Give her time to cool down and think it over and see through the game?"

"No. Give her time to git all het up over it till she was bound and determined to pay Lane back for trickin' her, no matter what it cost her; and then I'd give her a free hand to act. Meanin' that I'd have her followed, o' course, without her knowin' it, but I'd let her go wherever she had a mind to."

"But neither she nor Lane had anything to do with the murder itself, and it 'll be a week the day after to-morrow since it happened," the doctor objected. "If we don't do something soon the city newspapers will begin laughing at our local ability to handle the case, and you know what that will mean to the district attorney. I don't see that it matters what happened between her and Lane while Benkard was being murdered out here."

"Except that mebbe Lane suspects who done it, and wild hosses couldn't git him to talk. But if she once started in, bein' a woman, she'd tell everythin' she knew or had heard tell of, 'bout Lane and Benkard both, and all that Benkard had let out to her when he was payin' her 'tentions, besides what—what she opined herself as to the motive and the one who done it. I ain't got no notion what Sergeant Eliot's up to, nor that private detective feller, Mahoney, neither, but it seems to me this Zoe Dawn is your one chance, and then only if she talks willin' and free."

"Peters is right!" declared the detective, rising. "I don't know whether or not he expects her to come openly to headquarters and lay her cards on the table, but, anyway, she's our one best bet. I'll get her all steamed up, doctor, the way he suggests, and then leave it to her to make the next move."

"All right," Dr. Hood assented resignedly, as he followed his visitor to the door. "I don't see myself that there's anything else to be done."

"I gotta be movin' 'long, too, doc," Geoff remarked quickly as soon as Lyons had taken his departure. "Want to finish them doodabs on that terrace in the next day or two—"

"Geoff," the doctor interrupted, "I wish we could have managed ourselves to get that woman to talk. Don't you see that if she does go to headquarters and furnish them with any real clew, the city police will get all the credit? I don't want any, the Lord knows, but I'd like to have this county show 'em it can take care of its own troubles and that our justice isn't so blind even if she does wear a sunbonnet!"

Geoff grinned as he picked up his cap and started for the door.

"Don't you let that worry you none, doc. By all accounts, we're dealin' with a woman that's as smart as a steel trap, and she'd no more go nigh the city police than she'd send an invite for dinner to the chief of the Secret Service Departmint. I'm figgerin' on kind o' a little s'prise party for all concerned. You ain't heard from Allen since he followed Lane away from the Cayley place yesterday afternoon?"

"No. I'll get word somehow to you if I hear from him to-morrow."

But it was Geoff who encountered the lone motorcyclist on his way to work early the next morning, and the latter began hastily, without preamble:

"Glad I was in time to catch you, Peters. I left another of the boys on the job in New York and ran out here to make my report to the medical examiner, but the old woman who takes care of his cottage for him says he had a hurry call from somebody named Sim Perkins, and after that he's going his rounds. I can't wait—got to beat it back, and I guess you can get a message to him for me."

"Reckon so, Mr. Allen, if there ain't no partic'lar hurry 'bout it," Geoff replied. "I won't be able to see him till sundown."

"That's all right. I didn't want to phone; too many listening in. Now, bo, get this straight. Lane hit town at 7 P.M. Sunday night; phoned from a booth in the station to York 6260. Couldn't hear the message; coops on each side occupied and a crowd milling around in front. Lane went to his rooms for half an hour—no message incoming or outgoing while he was there; then to his club for dinner, all dolled up in evening clothes, and after that to a house near the park. I've got a memo here of the address, as well as that phone number."

Detective Allen handed over a slip of paper.

"He got there in a taxi about nine and left at twelve fifteen, going home to his rooms for the night. Next morning—yesterday—he was at his office at nine thirty, and went through his usual day's routine, stopping at his club for an hour afterward; then his rooms to change; dinner on the Belle-terre roof with a man identified as the head of a Chicago brokerage house; and then home. He was still there at six o'clock this morning. Is that all clear?"

"The main p'ints o' it," Geoff drawled. "Seems to me from somethin' the doc said, that I'd kinder keep tabs on the folks that come to Lane's office or that telephone to him to-day if you kin; reckon he thinks it's likely important."

Allen nodded and started the motor.

"Got you," he said briefly. "So-long."

He disappeared in a swirling cloud of dust down the road, and Geoff proceeded to the Cayley place, where he passed an uneventful day at work on the terrace. Mrs. Cayley and her daughter, as well as the two maids, kept closely indoors. Of neither the private detective nor the one from the county district attorney's office was there a sign.

At a little after five he ceased his labors, cleaned up the débris of his work, and started for home to have supper and feed his four-footed friends before delivering Allen's report to the doctor. As he neared the path which branched off across the meadow, however, he saw a smart little coupé halted at the crossroads ahead and caught a glimpse from within of an imperiously beckoning, white-gloved hand.

Geoff sauntered leisurely toward it, and one of the men in livery on the box descended and opened the rear door, disclosing a lady whose soft gray veil did not conceal her vivid coloring nor the almost feverish glow in the deep hazel eyes she bent upon him.

" Can you tell me where the doctor lives who is your medical examiner for—for criminal cases?"

Her low, bell-like tones faltered for an instant, and then went on quickly: " My chauffeur and footman do not understand English very well, and they could not quite grasp the directions given them."

" You mean Doc Hood, ma'am?" Geoff paused, cap in hand, as though considering the matter. " 'Tain't far, but if you're a stranger dunno's I could describe the turnin's to you, though I could p'int out the way easy 'nough by standin' on your runnin'-board, and I don't mind the walk back a mite."

" That is good of you." A smile flashed at him through the meshes of the veil. " Of course you will let me pay you—"

" No, ma'am." Geoff smiled back in simple deference. " Doc Hood's a friend o' us 'round here, and it ain't no trouble."

He was careful to direct the wooden-faced chauffeur by a roundabout route to the doctor's cottage, and all the way his blood ran swift with elation. Youngish-looking, handsome, brown eyes and hair, rich color, voice like the soft, vibrant echo of church bells—there couldn't be any mistake! Lyons must have done his work convincingly and well.

The coupé stopped before the doctor's gate just as that individual himself appeared upon the porch. He stared round-eyed when Geoff stepped from the running-board and advanced toward him, leaving the footman to open the door.

" Lady to see you, doc. That is, I reckon it's you, bein' as you're the med'cal examiner. That's who was asked for when I met up with the ottermobile just now at the crossroads."

Geoff turned as the lady descended and came up the path toward them, and the twinkle vanished from his own brown eyes as his tones deepened in gravity.

" This here is Dr. Hood, the med'cal examiner, Mis' Dawn. We been awaitin' for you to come and help us for nigh onto a week."

The woman halted and stood very still while she looked from one to the other of them.

The doctor gasped and then bowed, but she addressed Geoff.

" Who are you?" Her voice was metallic now, yet clear and steady. " How did you know my name?"

" I'm a special deputy o' the doctor's, ma'am, workin' on this here Benkard case with him. Geoffrey Peters my name is. I recognized you right away from your pictures, and as I say, we been waiting ever since we found out 'bout what friends you and Mr. Benkard used to be for you to come and tell us all you could that might help us to find out who killed him."

" That's true, Miss Dawn," the doctor supplemented in his gentle, almost fatherly tones. " Suppose we three come into my private office and talk things over?"

The woman shrugged, but followed in silence as he led the way into the little office sitting room and shut the door. Then she turned upon them both, throwing back her veil, and her great eyes glittered with a yellow, feline light.

" Yes, I am Zoe Dawn!" she cried. " I don't know whether this is a trap or not, nor why you should think I could help you to find out who murdered Joseph Benkard, even if I wanted to, but I'm here to tell a few facts that you may use as you like."

" Sit down, please," her host urged. " This isn't any trap, ma'am. We're plain-spoken folk out this way, and when we learned about you we figured it wasn't any use to bother you unless you came to us of your own free will, for nothing could compel you to speak. Isn't that so, Geoff?"

There was a more significant appeal behind the doctor's seemingly casual request for corroboration than appeared on the surface, and his ally recognized it and took the situation in hand.

" That's why we waited." Geoff nodded. " We needn't to tell you, Miss Dawn, 'bout the row between Mr. Lane and Mr. Benkard here at Sunny Beach last Wednesday night when Mr. Lane went tearin' in town to you, to git your help in crushin' the man he'd just broke with, the man who had played him for a sucker and then swore he'd ruin, same's he'd ruined others that I reckon you know of.

"As things turned out it was a waste o' time, wasn't it, for whilst you two was settin' in your drawin'-room till nigh mornin' plottin' and plannin' to drive him to the wall, somebuddy else did what put him forever beyond your reach."

The woman had listened intently, her beautiful lips curled in a smile that was half a sneer.

"If I had planned Mr. Benkard's ruin with Mr. Lane, as you say, why should I help to avenge his death?"

"Because, ma'am, I reckon if you'd hated him bad enough for that you'd 'a' killed him yourself with your own hands before this," replied Geoff quietly.

Zoe Dawn still stared at him, but gradually the yellow glitter in her eyes softened till they deepened to brown once more, and the sneering smile faded from her lips. Then without warning she burst into a storm of great, tearless sobs which welled up from within her, rending and twisting her beautiful body as though it were upon the rack. Geoff glanced uneasily at Dr. Hood, but the latter motioned to him to remain silent, and slowly the terrible sobbing subsided until at last the woman sank back spent and exhausted in her chair.

Then the fat little doctor arose, busied himself for a moment at his medicine cabinet, and came to her side with a glass in his hand.

"Drink this, Miss Dawn. It will do you good, and then you can tell us whatever you feel like. We won't pester you with a single question you don't want to answer, and nothing you say will go beyond these four walls."

She obeyed and touched his hand gropingly, like a child.

"Thank you. It is true, what this man says! I would have killed Joe Benkard long ago if I had not loved him too well!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE SURPRISE PARTY.

THE silence was so profound that the measured ticking of the tall clock in the corner sounded like dull hammer strokes and the drowsy twitter of birds seeking their nests among the trees came plainly in at the opened windows. Zoe Dawn clasped her white-gloved hands tightly together and began her story.

"It is nearly three years now since Joseph Benkard saw me at the races and became infatuated with me. He had heard of me, that other men in high places had tried to make me care for them, and I think it must have been these rumors of my supposed conquests which piqued him at first, but soon he himself began to care.

"I can say this without conceit, for I know that he fought against it, and I have reason to believe that until our meeting he lived only for ambition. From that hour, though, he who had mastered everybody and everything that opposed him, by fair means or foul—he loved me against his own will. As for me, I found after a few months of his strange, half-reluctant devotion that he meant more to me than all the world beside!"

Her hands unclasped and she struck the arm of the chair.

"What a fool I was! I thought that the world would forget me easily; that I could hide myself from it except for him until Zoe Dawn was no longer remembered. Then I might take my place as his wife. He led me to believe this, of course, and that as soon as he had reached the position of power in the financial world which he had set for himself he would marry me.

"I had made fools of men, but now the tables were turned. My trust was as blind as any unsophisticated girl's could have been. For almost two years I was absolutely happy, and then, just a few months ago, he changed. He was not tiring, but he was fighting against me and against himself. I fought back, but it was no use. He told me brutally that there could be no future for us together; that any wife would hamper him in his ambition, but one to whom the breath of past intrigue and scandal still clung would defeat all he had worked for and planned. His will was strongest in the end, you see, and I let him go."

The woman paused, and the soft summer twilight stealing in at the windows cast ever deepening shadows about her chair.

The doctor listened with averted face, but Geoff sat twisting his cap in his work-worn hands and gazing steadily through narrowed lids at their visitor. After a moment she went on:

"I hadn't any thought of reprisal; I was simply stunned. When that passed I went nearly crazy. It was then that I could have killed him, only I still cared. Then gradually I came to see him as he was—a petty, thieving schemer. I despised myself, but I hated him, and when Stoneham Lane came to me last Wednesday night and proposed that we work together to ruin him I fell in eagerly enough with his plan.

"Alone I could never have accomplished it, nor could Lane. But together, with my knowledge of Joe Benkard's innermost processes of thought and unscrupulous methods of manipulating the market—he had confided his secrets to me boastfully down to the smallest detail—and with Lane's own practical experience and mastery of the same game, we stood a fighting chance. Success would mean a fortune to Lane. He agreed to divide with me. Oh, I don't mind being frank about it—when love went out of my life men had become just what they were before, creatures to be used!

"Early next morning, though, Lane telephoned me the news of Joe's death, and the suspicion that it had been murder. He cautioned me to do or say nothing until I had heard from him again. On Sunday evening he came, and said the police had learned of his quarrel and break with Joe, and were looking up his whereabouts on Wednesday night; that he had refused to give an alibi till he had an opportunity to come to some agreement with me."

She hesitated, and Geoff nodded.

"O' course, with Mr. Benkard dead and gone, there was no reason why you should git into fresh notoriety after livin' quiet all these years. But if the folks who were investigatin' the case dragged you into it, anyway, you hadn't no call to protect Lane's name so's Wall Street wouldn't git on to his double dealin', unless he paid you well not to tell about his plan to ruin the feller he'd been workin' hand in glove with for months. He told you what to say if the police should come to you, didn't he?"

Dr. Hood made an odd, choking noise in his throat, but Zoe Dawn replied candidly:

"Yes. He knew I could tell the truth about his proposition and still save my own face by declaring I had refused to entertain it. It was worth the hundred thousand he promised me to shield him, for such a story would have put him out of the Wall Street game for good and all. It will, too, for if my name is even mentioned in the press in connection with this case the past will all be raked up again and this time I can never live it down. I mean that he shall suffer also, for he has double-crossed me! He told me, too, that he had been left certain stocks and bonds under the terms of Joe's will, made of course when they were secret partners, and that when it was probated he would sell them and give me one-quarter of the proceeds for my continued silence.

"I made my compact with him, and when a detective did come to me yesterday afternoon I kept my word. I gave the explanation of Lane's late visit to me on the night of the murder which we had concocted between us. To-day I discovered that he had been making a fool of me all the time, that he never intended to pay the price of my silence after I had once committed myself and that he had lied about Joe's will, too. He'd been left the bulk of the estate.

"I would not go to the detective bureau in New York with the true story for after the trumped-up version I had given them yesterday I knew they would never protect me from publicity. But when I found out that Lane was laughing at me in his sleeve I made up my mind to tell all I knew to some one who might find it useful in the investigation. I thought of you, doctor. You or your deputy may ask me any questions you like and I will answer. Please let me say first that my resentment against Lane is not my only motive in coming here. Ever since it was settled beyond doubt that Joseph Benkard was murdered I have not slept, feeling that I should come forward and tell what perhaps only I knew. I could have seen him ruined, beggared, driven to despair, but, oh, not dead! Not dead!"

She sank back once more in her chair,

staring straight before her in dull misery and only roused herself at the doctor's question.

"What is it you can tell us that perhaps only you know, Miss Dawn? I assure you again that you are speaking in the strictest confidence, and I beg that you will be absolutely frank with us."

"I shall be." The woman raised her dry, haggard eyes to his. "Doctor, there was something in Joseph Benkard's life that he feared! He was no coward, that much must be said for him, but something must have occurred in the past that preyed upon his mind, although he never consciously admitted it to me. I am sure now that he anticipated the death which actually came to him. The haunting dread of murder was ever in the back of his mind!

"When we first became interested in each other and I grew to know his every mood I observed that he had curious fits of depression at two periods of the year, in the early autumn and around the midwinter holidays. He told me that he had been receiving anonymous letters, evidently written by some lunatic, and threatening him with all sorts of dire things. I knew that could not be the real cause; that there was something deeper, something stamped indelibly on his memory.

"He had boasted to me of the men he had used and whose trust he had afterward deliberately betrayed, of the firms which, through his secret machinations, had been driven to the wall. He thought it supreme cleverness on his part, strokes of genius. His conscience did not trouble him in the least. Of this other thing he never spoke in his waking moments."

"You mean, ma'am"—the doctor leaned forward with his hands on his chubby knees—"you mean that he talked in his sleep?"

She nodded.

"He often came to me straight from the office after the market closed in the afternoon, utterly exhausted in mind and body with the day's conflict and strain, and would throw himself on the davenport in my library and fall almost instantly into a brief but deep and profound slumber. He awoke strengthened and refreshed, but I began to fancy that he looked at me oddly, in a queer, suspicious sort of way, and on one occasion he remarked that he had had a wretched dream full of vague, silly horrors, and asked if he had talked any gibberish.

"I assured him that he hadn't, but after that I commenced to wonder, for beside those strange periods of depression which lasted for days he had recurring moods which would come upon him at any time without warning or apparent reason. In restaurants, at the races, the play, in the midst of the most frivolous conversation he would suddenly become detached and sit staring in front of him as if at something which no one else could see. He roused himself at once when I touched or spoke to him, but I noticed that he studied me afterward in a keen, wary fashion to see if I was surprised or curious, and I schooled myself to ignore these moments of preoccupation and let him shake them off of his own accord.

"They worried me, though, and my wonderment grew until one afternoon a year ago last winter when he had fallen asleep in the library while I made tea. All at once he cried out in a horrible, choking fashion and then the words came distinctly: 'Not murder! Not that!'

"There was such indescribable terror in his tone that I was frightened, too, and I sat absolutely still and waited, but he only mumbled after that, then sighed and suddenly opened his eyes. Oh, I was glad I had learned self-control, and could smile and tease him about being so bored with my company that he had fallen asleep! He suspected nothing, but after that almost as though his subconscious mind trusted me he talked frequently in those weird dreams of his, sometimes defying 'them' to harm him and at others begging abjectly, piteously for his life. But most often of all there would be that recurring word 'murder' and a shuddering fear and horror of it. That is all. There was never a hint as to who he feared nor why, but I thought, doctor, that you should know of this."

"It is interesting, certainly," the doctor remarked with a side glance at Geoff. "You say that Mr. Benkard never once in his waking moments referred to this matter?"

"Never, but he was always on guard

lest he should. He told me enough about his stock manipulations to damn him, ruin him forever among reputable financiers if any one could have proved his trickery. He gloried in it! There could have been nothing in his business career, no one of those whose failure lay virtually at his door who could have caused that fear, and yet I could always feel the shadow of it, like a wall between us!"

"Mebbe he didn't never give you a actual hint, sleepin' or wakin', ma'am, as to the party he thought was goin' to try to murder him some day, but didn't you ever kinder suspicion yourself who he might have reason to be afeered o'?" Geoff asked. "Couldn't you put two and two together and figger it out? Ain't you got no notion who 'twas?"

Zoe Dawn shook her head wearily.

"I used to think and think about it till it seemed as if I should go mad! The very fact that he dared not tell even me made it appear a vital, living menace in my eyes. Sometimes I feared that I should pick up the paper one day and read what—what I actually did read last week. Only now it has ceased to matter." Her lips twisted in a faint smile, but the suffering in her eyes belied it.

"I would help you more if I could, please believe that. If I had a definite suspicion I would voice it, but I only know that he foresaw this and dreaded it!"

"Miss Dawn, will you tell the doc and me who you really are and where you come from?" Geoff regarded her mildly, but there was a deepened gravity in his tone. "Who were your folks and where are they now?"

Dr. Hood looked his surprise, and the woman roused herself from her apathy and returned the pseudo deputy's gaze with a curious, faintly amused expression.

"Mr. Peters, there are certain persons in this country—quite a small army of them and remarkably well organized—whose duty and purpose in life it is to find out about other people just what you have asked me. The cleverest of them were at one time detailed to trace my origin, my antecedents, to learn whatever they could about me before I had appeared in a particular city—and they discovered nothing.

"When I told the medical examiner and you that I would answer any questions you liked I meant, of course, anything relative to Mr. Benkard and his attentions to me, any light that I could possibly throw upon his death. As for me, I am Zoe Dawn, I came to New York from Washington, where I had lived for several years and where I am doubtless remembered still. That is all."

Zoe Dawn paused; then rose to her feet. Neither man spoke. Slowly she said:

"Living, I was sure that I hated him. I would have crushed the ambition for which he put me aside. Now that he is dead I—I would give anything in the world to bring him back, even if I were never to see him, never to hear his name! Ruthless and crooked he may have been to others, cruel and heartless to me at the last, but he was my mate! I have realized it more fully since I came into this room than at any moment since his death. Are—are there any more questions you wish to ask? It is late and I—I am very tired."

"No, ma'am." Geoff had already got to his feet, and as the doctor turned the light switch in the wall he added: "If somethin' should come up that you could help us 'bout and you wouldn't likely care to have us comin' to your house it 'll be all right if the doctor calls you up on the telephone?"

In the crude, yellow glare from the electric bulbs the woman seemed to have aged years since their meeting at the crossroads before the sun went down. As though realizing this herself he hurriedly drew down her veil while she replied:

"Any day, any hour that Dr. Hood sends for me I shall come."

She held out her hand, and Geoff shook it awkwardly, then remained where he was while the doctor bustled out to light up the porch and escort his visitor to her car. After an interval it drove off through the darkness and the doctor returned to find Geoff still standing where he had left him. His jaw had dropped, and below the shock of sandy hair which fell over his forehead his lack-luster eyes stared vacantly into space.

"Hey, what's the matter with you?" his host demanded. "Have you taken root?

You got the woman down here, as I can understand now that you planned to do, Geoff, when you gave Lyons instructions last night to tell her Lane had gone back on their bargain. But aside from hearing that Benkard was afraid for his life, which we knew already from William Dunn and old Henry, I don't see where the surprise party you spoke of comes in."

"Don't you, doc?" Geoff's eyes traveled slowly to the other's face and he grinned. "Just you set down and think over what that Zoey woman said real careful. I ain't took root and I gotta go home now and git the mare in under the shed; heavy dew's bad for her rheumatiz. The surprise I had wasn't just the sort I thought likely we'd git and mebbe it 'll turn out to be nothin' 'cept a crazy idee, but it kinder struck me all of a sudden and I'll have to work over it in my own mind afore I talk much, and see how it fits in with the rest."

"What 'rest'?" demanded the thoroughly exasperated medical examiner. "There isn't any 'rest' to the case, that I know of, and we're back where we started! We've no more notion than we had in the beginning who committed the murder!"

Geoff slouched to the door and then paused.

"If the idee that hit me is correct," he said, "there wasn't no murder committed."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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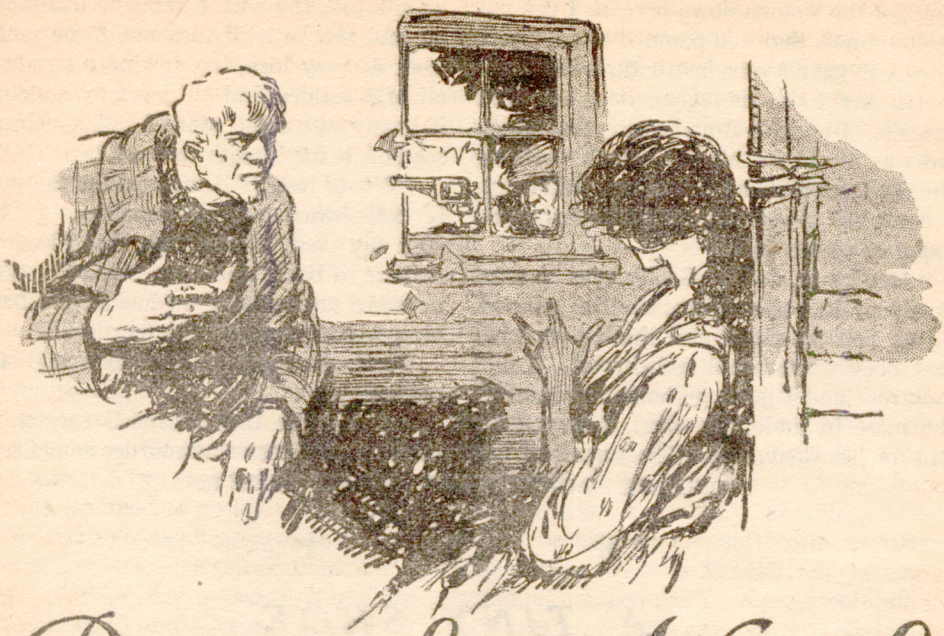
A TINY SHOE

THEY found him by the roadside dead,
A ragged tramp unknown;
His face upturned in mute despair,
His helpless arms outthrown.
The lark above him sang a song
Of greeting to the day,
The breeze blew fresh and sweet, and stirred
His hair in wanton play.

They found no clew to home or name,
But tied with ribbon blue
They found a package, and it held
A baby's tiny shoe.
Half worn and old, a button off,
It seemed a sacred thing;
With reverence they wrapped it close
And tied the faded string.

And laid it on the peaceful breast
That kept the secret well;
And God will know and understand
The story it will tell
Of happy times and peaceful home
That dead tramp some time knew,
Whose only relic left him was
The baby's tiny shoe.



Pride of the North

By HAROLD DE POLO

THERE was many a sigh in the northland when Raoul Armagnac passed on to the beyond. The old French fur trader, for all his quite inordinate pride, had been a deeply beloved person. Although his sense of justice had occasionally been almost too stern, so, likewise, had his generosity in helping those in trouble been almost too great. On the whole, there was unanimous sadness on the trails, at the posts, in the far settlements, when word first arrived of his death. A good man, it was agreed, had left the world.

Men began to speculate after the first shock of the news as to what would became of the Armagnac post at the headwaters of Lac Morte. For thirty—yes, for thirty-four years—the wiry, slim, little Frenchman had carried on his business at this desolate station close to the fur section.

He had handled his affairs alone—and this meant, as well, without even a single Indian or half-breed for the daily chores—ever since the death of his wife close to thirty years before. Coldly, with that queer pride that had somehow strangely commanded attention, he had refused all offers of companionship when they had been suggested. Yes; an odd one had been M. Armagnac.

A pity that it had not been a boy, instead of a girl, that child that had been the death of the mother at birth. They remembered her but slightly—Gervaise Armagnac—although they had heard of her much. She was, indeed, the one thing of which the trader had been willing to speak at any length. Did you but press your hinting, sufficiently, he had always been ready, these last few years, to tell you of her triumphs on the concert stages of Europe, and to show you pictures and clippings.

That, people said, was where practically

all of his money went, in that expensive education, and later in that truly criminally costly vocal training, since he had sent her away to the outside during her eighth year. In all that time she had been back twice, and in all that time he himself had gone to visit her a like number of occasions.

She, of course, would inherit the post; and she, of course, would dispose of it to perhaps the first bidder. Yes, but it was a pity that it had not been a boy. It would be hard, the realization now struck heavily home, not to have an Armagnac at Lac Morte. A fair man, though a rigidly just and maybe too proud one, was gone. He would be missed. *Le bon Dieu* rest his soul!

Before even that wave of regret—and grief, in not infrequent cases—had died down, that portion of the northland taking an interest in the name of Armagnac received a surprise. Even far ahead of the day that the letter written by Hector Campbell could have reached her in distant Vienna, Gervaise herself appeared at the settlement of Fork River Landing. She came, too, with the full knowledge of what had transpired, for her opening remark, addressed to Père Louvois, who had been the first to recognize her, was to inquire the whereabouts of her father's grave.

The old priest, grizzled and kindly yet imperturbable when need be, was perhaps one of the very few in the country who would not have asked her where she had obtained her news. He knew the pride of the Armagnacs, and he simply spoke quietly and straight out:

"Where he wished it to be, my child!"

"Under the blasted spruce on the bluff behind the house, father? Facing the north, and the headwaters?"

"Yes, my child."

"Thank you, father."

"I may find you a lodging for the night, Gervaise? There is Mme. Pigneron, who has—"

"If you would be so kind, Père Louvois, I wish to start for Lac Morte this afternoon, or to-night, without fail."

"Hector Campbell," said the priest, after a moment of pondering, "will doubtless be leaving close to sundown. You remember him? He was your father's nearest neighbor, and probably he can be persuaded to take you beyond his home, to the post."

"Yes, I remember him—a Scotch trapper. He lived some four leagues this side of us, did he not?"

"He still does, my child; yes."

"Then may I ask the favor of helping me find him, father?"

"It is simple. He is buying provisions at the store."

There they found him. The lean, sandy, middle-aged fur hunter, fortunately for her feelings, was another one of the few who did not bother with questions. Unusual though her request was to be taken to the lonely, uninhabited post, his answer came with the same emotionless deliberation that was habitual with him:

"Then 'twould be wise to hold yourself in readiness, for we'd best start within the hour, with the added weight. 'Tis until dawn we travel, no more."

"I am ready now, Mr. Campbell."

"'Tis a departure from the ways of your sex, Miss Armagnac," was the Scot's grave answer as he searched for the next item on his list of stores.

The trip over the frozen snows, behind Campbell's powerful string of huskies, was as faultless, as swift, as any man beside the dead father of the girl could have made it. Also, it was doubtless one of the most silent ones wherein two humans were concerned.

"We're doin' not badly," said the Scot after they had been on the trail some two hours. Then he added, quite naturally and without personal meaning, but purely from pride in his dogs. "I can do better alone, ye know; the added weight—"

"Yes," cut in Gervaise, thoroughly understanding. "It puts two minutes more on each mile, about."

"Just about," agreed the trapper, lengthily and gravely surveying her with respect.

Fully three hours later, for the second time, he broke the silence between them:

"Might I ask what price ye've set on the post, Miss Armagnac? 'Tis not, need I say, from curiousness. I might, mayhap, like to give it some thought myself."

"There is *no* price on the post, Mr. Campbell," was the firm and instant answer. "I intend to remain there, alone, and continue the work of the Armagnacs."

Although the news got no verbal sign of surprise from the stoical Scotchman, it did betray him into starting a sudden whistle, which he nevertheless instantly stilled as he took in his breath. After that, until they reached Lac Morte, there was no word.

Once at the post, with dawn just breaking, Gervaise insisted on treating his assistance as a plain business matter—as her father would have done—and settling then and there. Furthermore, she made arrangement for him to bring in to her the string of dogs which he had thoughtfully taken charge of at the passing of his neighbor. She asked him also a few questions relative to present conditions, and then she put out her hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Campbell—deeply."

He took the outstretched hand and held it, and looked at her searchingly, and for what any one in the northland would have told you was the first time, he took it upon himself to give advice that had not been requested:

"I'm hopin' ye'll not take it illy, Miss Armagnac, when I'm hintin' that 'tis maybe a dangerous place sometime, here alone, for a bonnie lass. Ye'd best—"

"Thank you, Mr. Campbell," she said, the pressure of her fingers stronger, "and it is taken appreciatively. I have carried a weapon before, and know how to use one."

He left her, then, and as he drove away he saw her kneeling by the crude wooden cross under the ancient spruce on the bluff.

"I do not think," said Hector Campbell to himself, after he had covered a mile in frowning thought, "that they need have fears because it was not a boy."

The opinion expressed by the veteran trapper on that first morning became practically unanimous before many weeks had gone by. Gervaise Armagnac took up the reins where her father had dropped them, and although there were the usual two or three masculinists who tried to grumble and find fault, even they had to confess, soon, that the Armagnac name was worthily held. She was as fair in her dealings as had been the old trader himself, as sternly just in her decisions, and—if the truth must be told and if such a thing could be—maybe more proud. *Sacré*, yes. But what a brave light, what a fighting glint, could come to her eye!

Those same eyes, too, were causing the snow to become more heavily packed along the trails that lead to the headwaters of Lac Morte. They looked, as a poetically inclined gold prospector put it, like wild wood violets when they first come up in the spring of the year after a soft rain. He went on as well to say that her hair was more lovely in coloring than that particular type of burnished-gold oak leaf you occasionally see in the autumn, and that her lips, regardless of the almost haughty curve to them, were as crimson, as warmly inviting, as those blossoms of the *flamboyan* tree that they have in the tropics.

But with all these pretty things he told—for he put them and much more, in a verse and sent it—he got no further than the rest. Which was not any distance.

"I am thinking," was the manner in which Père Louvois put it to himself with a chuckle, "that there *is* many a one again wishing it had been a boy!"

Of course, said the women at Fork River Landing after several months had passed, there was naturally but one thing to it. It was some tragic love affair of her travels abroad, when she had been on those big stages in the gay cities. Certainly, without doubt. It was ridiculous otherwise, was it not, for a woman—yes, a woman, and not a girl—to remain single and alone? Why, was she not twenty—nearly twenty-nine?

She was, indeed. And that was it, unfailingly. Perhaps some quarrel—perhaps he had died. Who could tell? Why, had she not even refused the great Sven Landquist, the Swedish prospector who had recently found fabulous wealth and who was the dream of all girls?

But one of these gossipers, during an afternoon that was supposed to be devoted to sewing by the little group, insisted that it was because the right man had not as yet come along. She herself, it must be confessed, had been a widow for three years

and had only the week before become engaged to her second choice.

"Wait," she said, with a happy, hopeful sigh. "Ah, but wait, perhaps, until M. Jason Kirk comes to pay court! *There* is a man of men, as even my René himself says!"

This idea, it must be admitted, caused somewhat of a flurry of talk. It was quite true, they all agreed, that M. Jason Kirk, the American gold hunter, was one of his kind among thousands. With his striking blondness, his tall and powerful physique, his clear gray eye, he might be likened to a young god of the olden days.

Furthermore, there was none with a cleaner thought, with a more reckless bravery, with a hand always ready to help the weak and the unfortunate, and also quite as ready to administer punishment to the oppressive strong and tyrannous wicked. Added to this, they immediately pointed out, was that queer and silent pride of the man that was fully equal—ah, and even greater—than that of the Armagnacs.

Yes, assuredly it would be interesting when these two came together.

But the women of Three Fork Landing were served with perplexed disappointment, and the men with that faint glimmer of hope that can never die when a woman like Gervaise is the dreamed-of goal, when the meeting took place.

It was close to four months since she had taken up the duties of the Lac Morte post, and she had driven her team into the settlement for provisions. There was to be a dance that evening, in honor of the storekeeper's daughter. He, as well as Hector Campbell and Père Louvois, had pleaded with Mlle. Armagnac to stay and attend the festivities. She need not enter into them, in her mourning; she might just sit about and watch, and talk. To this she concurred, for she felt under obligations to the Scot and the priest, and did not wish to offend.

It was comparatively late when Jason appeared, and some were nervous lest he should fail to arrive. By a fellow prospector, he had sent word that he would be there, and had laughingly added to be sure and tell Babette to save a dance for him. He asked for this immediately, as he entered the doorway, without even removing his outside moccasins or mackinaw, his fur cap or mittens. As he swung her around in the waltz, he placed a necklace of pure gold nuggets about her neck. But to this, when they stopped breathlessly, her father demurred:

"Bah, M. Pompelle," laughed Jason Kirk, "cannot an old friend show his esteem? Although maybe a bit premature, consider it then as a wedding gift. For you'll lose her fast enough, *mon ami,* never fear!"

It was then, while all eyes were watching, that Père Louvois signalled him. He was sitting, in a corner, with Gervaise Armagnac. They had been discussing the capital of far-off France, which both knew well, and her exquisite face had shown more vivacity than any had been known to see there before.

"M. Jason, my son," began the priest, "I wish to—"

But no one in that wide, long, low-ceilinged room, although the fiddling had stopped and breaths were held, listened to a word of the introduction that followed. They were too busy, too intent, watching the faces of the two in the corner.

They saw, for a mere factional second, a strange look pass between the two as their eyes met and held; they saw, as well, a certain almost unconscious swaying forward of their bodies, as if, somehow, by magnets, they were drawn each to the other; and then, suddenly, decisively, they claim that each of these proud beings pulled back, suggesting that their wills had crossed and locked—and remained so.

Anyway, the face of Gervaise became cold with hauteur, while that of Jason turned immobile. Very low and very gracefully, for a man of his towering build, he bowed, and she replied to it with an exaggeratedly deep courtesy.

Following this he made his departure, nor did they so much as give one another a word or a single glance the rest of the evening.

"Daft, Father, the pair of them—daft with pride!"

That was the way that Hector Campbell

put it, as he and the priest stood apart by themselves. And Père Louvois, after great deliberation, answered with a huge sigh:

"Although I do not intimate any comparison otherwise, I confess that their pride can almost be likened to that of Satan! An odd world, sometimes," he added, "for I had truly thought that these two might—well, that they might have been each made for the other!"

Wherein the good Father had not been by himself.

Another month went by, but still the tongues, of the women and the men, were busy with the affairs of Gervaise Armagnac. It is true that she handled her trading at the post with as expert a grasp as her father, but how a girl or a woman could live that life alone, in that grim desolateness of Lac Morte, was beyond comprehension. For all her pride, they swore, she wanted something—some one—but what? That was the question; that was the thing that puzzled. What?

There were many—Hector and the *père* among them—who rued the fact that she and Jason had been so antagonistic. She needed a man, up there at that cabin by the headwaters, and they had deemed that he was the most acceptable. Him, too, they blamed even more than Gervaise. Just because he had probably heard about her pride, they averred, was no reason for him so brazenly to put forth his own. No. He had acted with as much stupidity as—yes—as Gervaise herself.

Could the gossips, in particular, have seen him one night at Louis Leblanc's, some five weeks after that memorable dance at M. Pompelle's, they might have been given pause.

The aforesaid Louis, it should be known, was proprietor of what was conceded to be the worst—or the best, as you looked at it—gaming and drinking haven in the northland. It was over at Boileau's Hope, the current prospecting center, a fair score of miles from Fork River Landing and easily that much further away than the settlement from the post at Lac Morte.

Jason Kirk, while not to be classed as an habitué of the place, occasionally dropped in, while at camp, for a game of stud. This, always, was confined to a table composed only of men he knew well.

On this night, however, he was not even enjoying this infrequent recreation. He had badly twisted an ankle, that afternoon, and had been forced to lay up in one of the rooms above the bar. Finding sleep long in coming, he had improvised a crutch from one of the slats in his bed. With this, he hobbled down below.

"Ha!" welcomed the urbane Louis, who never missed the most slight move. "So M. Kirk, maybe, is going to attempt to wreck the faro bank, as he did four years ago?"

"Not to-night, Louis," smiled Jason. "This hanged ankle won't let me sleep, and I just traipsed down to see if there was any decent stake game running. Feel like amusing myself by just watching one."

M. Leblanc, at that, spoke at least three of the proverbial volumes with his shoulders and his eyes. He intimated, all in that one shrug and rolling of the orbs, that the world had gone plainly and irremediably to the devil. And, to prove this, he ended with a spit of disgust:

"Bah, M. Kirk, but just look, for example, at this Swedish Sven Landquist. In the brave old days—ah, those good days such as when you yourself broke the bank—a man making such a strike as he has would play to the limit, and even ask to have it removed. But this Swede? *Cochon!* He was here, to-night, and after he had lost a paltry two thousand in dust, or maybe a trifle more, he becomes infuriated, and stamps out, and gets his team, and says that he is traveling to where there is better excitement. Bah! It was his chagrin at losing, that was all that—"

"Had he been drinking, Louis?"

The question had been asked quietly, but there was something in the tone, in those gray eyes, that stopped the gambler's volubility. His answer came direct:

"He had, M. Kirk!"

"The way he does every three or four months—heavily?"

"Yes. It seemed one of his nights!"

"He traveled north?"

"Yes!"

"How long ago?"

"Two—yes, over two hours!"

Jason Kirk frowned, his jaw hardening, his eyes narrowing. His words came more rapidly:

"Your dogs are fresh, Louis?"

"They haven't felt harness in five days."

"I may borrow them, please?"

"Naturally, and anything else I own. I do not forget the time when I was—"

"Then, please, Louis, have some one put them to the lightest sled you own, as quickly as possible. I'm going upstairs for a moment, and will get out the back way, so kindly have them there. Also, I ask you to keep this private."

"It is locked in a tomb, M. Kirk."

Jason Kirk, with what was justly reputed to be one of the fastest and strongest dog teams in the Northland before him, was assuredly going to prove the contention regarding their speed. He was an expert driver who could get to the soul of a husky, and never had he needed to as now. He knew that Sven Landquist, when sober, was a taciturn man who minded his own business and stuck to his code of honor; but he knew, likewise, that Sven Landquist, drunk, was a beast without reason who stopped at nothing to further his passions.

He remembered—and could never forget—that night some two years back, when he had saved Eloise Lorges, a girl who had refused Sven, from the Scandinavian. He could not forget, either, that Gervaise Armagnac had also not accepted Landquist, and that the latter was on one of his periodical drinking bouts, and—that Lac Morte lay to the north.

Of that trip to the post there is not much to tell. Though Sven himself, equipped with a sturdy and rapid team, made good progress, Jason Kirk proved conclusively that Louis Leblanc was right in dubbing his string one of the best in the country. For all the couple of hours start the other man had, the American was cutting it down at each mile he covered.

Halfway there, when he stopped and closely examined the tracks of the huskies in advance, his experienced eye told him that he was not more than an hour behind; at two-thirds of the distance he was certain that he was not above twenty to twenty-five minutes in the rear; and when finally he came to the rise in ground that was only a scant hundred yards from the post itself he judged that the Swede, at the very outside, had beaten him by perhaps ten minutes.

Jason Kirk, then, acted quickly. Slipping off the sled, and bidding the well-trained huskies to remain silently where they were, he crawled along on his knees to the top of that small knoll. A single glance instantly showed him Landquist's team of dogs at the front door, as well as a broken window at the side of the cabin. From it, too, there came a grating, triumphant laugh.

His face grim and slightly whitened, Jason made for the fringe of spruce trees at the rear of the domicile. The agony in his throbbing leg was forgotten as he dragged himself forward. Knowing the interior of the post well, he set out for a window at the back that would give him a view into the same room to which the Swede had forced his entrance. In a full sixty seconds, at the most, he had managed to reach the window without attracting the attention of the tired huskies in front. Then, swiftly, he got to his one good foot.

A quick, short sigh of relief escaped him as he took in the scene before him. Gervaise Armagnac, in dressing gown and slippers, was standing against the farther wall. Her face was drawn, deathly pale, but yet in those fine eyes there blazed the scorn and the pride of her blood. In front of her, perhaps a couple of yards, was Sven Landquist. There was the desire of hell in the Swede's eyes, in his face that had turned bestial, in his gloating voice that rang with guttural anticipation.

"You theenk Sven Landquist no good enough, heh?" he was saying, as he advanced with clawing hands. "You t'row away decent offer of marriage, heh? Ha, ha! *Fortusam,* my proud woman, but you goin' find out—"

Simultaneously Jason stuck his revolver through the pane of glass and spoke. "Put 'em up, Landquist!"

With an oath, a grunt of surprise, the Scandinavian whirled about. Wildly, fiercely he looked in the direction from whence the words had come. Then, his eyes blazing on that arm holding the weapon, his own hand waveringly—just *too* waveringly—started to go to his hip. Before it reached there, however, more words came to him—words, somehow, that brought to his mind that other night two years ago:

"I'll put a bullet through your brain, Landquist, if you move an inch. It's Jason Kirk!"

Stunned and noticeably sobered, the Swede stood there trembling—trembling like the craven at heart that he was.

"Take that gun from your holster—with your left hand—and place it quietly on the floor. I think you know, too, that if you make one false gesture what will happen."

Jason then spoke to the girl, who was still standing there, white, tensed, but with her every nerve under perfect control: "When he places the revolver on the floor, Miss Armagnac, take it and cover him. If he tries any tricks, shoot to kill. I am coming in by the front door."

"Thank you, Mr. Kirk," was the almost casual reply. "I shall shoot as you say if necessary."

Jason, once inside, wasted no time. Leaning against the door and favoring his bad foot, he bade Landquist approach him with his arms extended and his wrists one over the other. Then, with a piece of stout rope which the girl had handed him, he bound them securely together. After that he opened the door.

"Wait outside," he told his captive. "And while you are waiting you might as well plan your exit from the country. I am giving you twenty-four hours, after I set you down outside of Boileau's Hope, to leave the Northland. If I find you after that—"

Jason Kirk shrugged, steadied himself with a hand on the knob, then faced Gervaise Armagnac as he closed the door. Silently, lengthily he gazed at her. In his gray eyes, as they met her own, there was an expression of searching, of almost pleading, question.

She herself, with a warm flush now quickly spreading over her cheeks, must have seen that something, too, in his eyes. She replied to it, however, in a dry, reserved voice that was as perfectly poised, apparently, as were her own emotions.

"It does no good to say how grateful I am, Ja—Mr. Kirk. Any favor I may do in return—anything I possess—"

"*Anything*—Gervaise?"

Softly—but with a softness that was smoldering—he spoke the words. Instinctively he bent forward and, struggling with the pride in those clear gray eyes of his, there was a look of hunger, of longing, of hope.

For a brief instant, as on that night at M. Pompelle's in Fork River Landing, these two seemed to sway unconsciously each to the other; but again, as on that other evening, they failed to come together. This time, it must be openly confessed, it was that mad Armagnac pride which first caused the dissension.

"Anything," answered Gervaise—and just the barest trace of scorn could be detected in the slightly upward curve of her lip—"that is—asked!"

As if slapped in the face, Jason Kirk straightened. His cheek reddened, then whitened—reddened again. In a cold fury that he could not hide he shifted on his foot and opened the door.

"I never ask for that which is not freely and specifically offered." He went outside.

Still the gossips at Fork River Landing wondered, and conjectured, and even made believe that they suspected something definite in one or two cases. For Gervaise Armagnac still stayed alone at Lac Morte, attending to her duties, and as coldly unmindful as ever of men; and still Jason Kirk prospected out to the east of Boileau's Hope, and had no second meeting—for they knew not of that adventure at the post—with the beautiful daughter of the dead fur trader.

They were anxious for it to happen—particularly the little widow, now contentedly married—because various ones kept insisting that they were, inherently, people purely born to be mated. Could they have

been there when this meeting *did* occur, what would they not have given? *Dieu*, but they would have with gladness paid dearly!

Jason Kirk, some six weeks later, was once more at Louis Leblanc's. With seven others, he sat at a table under the central acetylene lamp. The faro layouts, the roulette wheels, the bar, were practically deserted. Here were eight old-timers, as the phrase had it, sitting down to what promised to be one of the biggest stud games in years.

Notice of it had come in advance—even a full week in advance—for it had been noised about that these eight men, who had not had large play in several years, had decided to enjoy at least one more real game. Need it be said, therefore, that onlookers were actually on the point of drawing weapons for a chance at a place that would give them a good view?

Before the game had been long in progress they were witnessing the action for which they had hoped. With two sevens showing against a pair of queens and a pair of aces, respectively, Jason had raised the hundred-dollar bet an even thousand. But then, before the breathless crowd could learn what his opponents might do, there came an interruption that far, far more thrilled them than the completion of that deal, no matter what it might have been, could have.

"Raise your hands high—high—Mackenzie Joe. And you, too, Paul Duschene! I promise on my father's soul, if you don't, that I positively will kill without another word!"

From the doorway the words came—came in the clear, resolute voice of Gervaise Armagnac.

Instantly, with the coolness that was always his in a crisis, Jason Kirk was on his feet, his revolver out and ready. In a flash his eyes followed those of Gervaise, standing in the doorway with her rifle leveled. He had seen that the half-breed she had mentioned first—Mackenzie Joe—was covered by her own weapon. Immediately, therefore, his gaze searched for the other man, Paul Duschene, and found him on the inner circle, directly opposite him, of the audience that pressed about the table. He drew a bead on him, and then asked quietly: "What is the trouble, Miss Armagnac?"

Before replying she looked hastily at the two men with arms raised.

"Have those two looked after first, Jason!"

With the thrill running through him that his name on her lips had given him he nodded to several companions at the table. "Mind covering them, boys?"

Even before this was done, completely, Gervaise stepped closer to him. Her face was very white, except for two crimson patches on either cheek bone, and her breath was coming hard. Her glorious hair was awry, and she pushed several strands from her eyes as she spoke—eyes now that were large and wet.

"The trouble isn't any more, Jason," she said. "The trouble always has been, in the past, my terrible pride and—and your own, as well."

She was looking at him squarely through that lane that had instinctively parted between them, and she appeared utterly oblivious to the fact that the huge room held another person than just the two of them. "Yes, Jason," she went on firmly, "it is our pride—*my* pride, like the other night at the post—that has kept us apart so long. Sven Landquist came again this morning at dawn. This time I was able to disarm him. In his rage he let out his plan. This Paul Duschene man, some time during the night, was to make you fight. He was to bring in my name. Before you could draw your weapon Mackenzie Joe, who would be standing where he is by the end of that bar, was to shoot you from behind. He would be near the window, and a fast team was waiting in the rear. The two were to be paid well—fabulously. That is why I came and—"

"Gervaise," cut in Jason gently, "we are not alone. Perhaps you would rather explain to me later, in pri—"

"No, Jason—*no!*"

Almost fiercely the words came from her. She stepped nearer, and there was appeal in her eyes, in her hands that had suddenly been outstretched

"Do you not see that I must tell everything openly, publicly, in order to prove to myself—to the two of us—that I have mastered this pride? Nine years ago, Jason, I let my pride take me from the man I loved. Yes, *my* pride, for I was always the first to exhibit it.

"After I left the convent there in Quebec, and we became engaged, I did not explain to you, when you said that I was selfish to leave my father away up here in the Northland, that it was his dearest wish in the world to have me made famous by my voice.

"I did not explain to you, Jason, that I loved the life of Lac Morte, that it was the one thing in the world I desired, and that I was giving it up for him. No, Jason, I did not explain to you. Instead, we stupidly quarreled, and although it was primarily my own fault, you yourself disappeared."

She paused for a moment breathlessly, and Jason, who had always been so keenly alive to human surroundings, for once forgot that they were not alone.

"No, Gervaise," he said, stepping nearer to her, "it was even more my fault. I am putting the past, for the moment, aside. When you came here this last time, after I had sent you that cable, I was wrong not to be here myself to meet you."

"I knew you had sent it, Jason," she said simply, "and I admit that I—I maybe expected to see you when I arrived. I think that was why, when you asked me if I really meant *anything* that morning at the post, I deliberately answered in a tone that I knew would anger you and arouse your pride."

Jason Kirk made as if to expostulate, as if to start to prove that he himself only was to blame. He changed his mind.

"Don't you think, Gervaise, that we'd better go and rout out Père Louvois before we head for Lac Morte?"

"I do, Jason!" And she added: "Freely and specifically!"

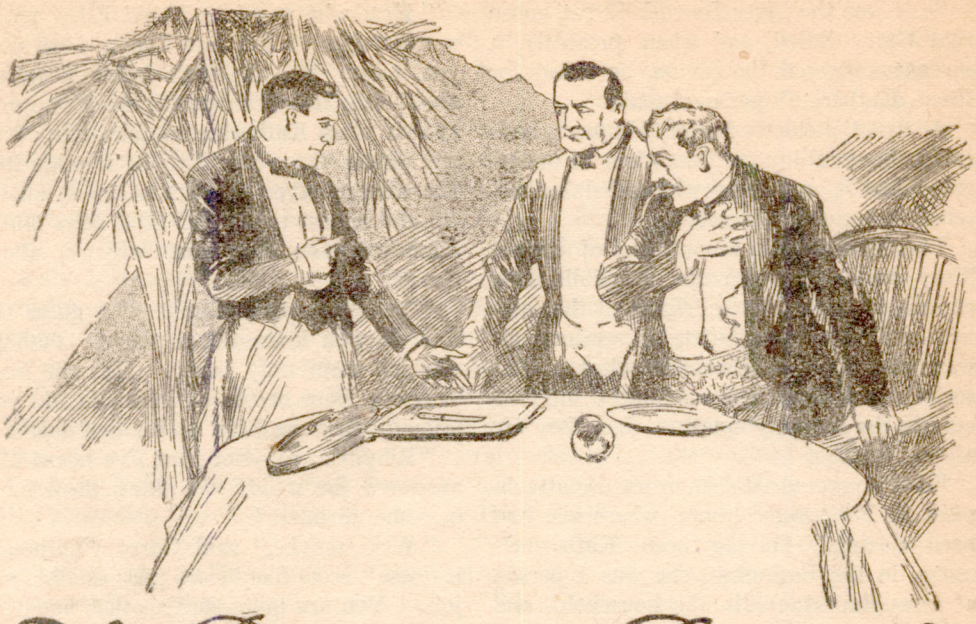
FAT

WE have too many raisins in our cake;
Our bread is muffined.
We need a musty crust of last year's bake,
Coarsened and roughened;
We need to smack it down with jaws that ache,
Hardened and toughened.

There is too much of eider in our bed,
Silkened and softened;
We lounge, with luxury about us spread,
Even when coffined.

Our prayers are patter and our god is gold;
Sweat is our foeman.
Our lips are lustful and our eyes are cold;
Is it an omen?
And shall we follow, fat and gouty-soled,
After the Roman?

Edmund Vance Cooke.



The Dance of Death

By FRED JACKSON

Author of "The First Law," "The Third Act," "The Diamond Necklace," etc.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NEVER GIVE UP HOPE.

GARRY'S first thought, when he left Bartlett's table, was to get in touch with Katherine's maid. Obviously she was the only other person in the world, besides Katherine, who might be able to tell him about the powders. Accordingly he headed for the telephone booths and called Katherine's number.

They still lived in East Sixty-Seventh Street — the Kendalls — in the house that Katherine's mother had planned as a bride. It was a bit old-fashioned now, and rather large for just Katherine and her brother; but it had always been home to them, and they clung to it still. They had grown up in the nursery upstairs. They had had their first birthday parties in the big drawing-rooms. When they were old enough to appear in public with their elders, their governess and tutor had sent them down to the dining room for dessert. The whole house, from cellar to garret, was rich in associations, so they had never seriously considered leaving it.

In fact, the plans were laid for Katherine to continue living there, even after her brother was married. He, of course, would take an apartment in the Park Avenue section. Muriel preferred that, and Katherine, refusing to become one of their household, had determined to find a worthy and respectable companion somewhere among the older families, and to maintain an establishment of her own. Such a plan would have horrified her grandmother; but nobody seemed to think it strange among her own immediate intimates.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 28.

So it was the Sixty-Seventh Street house that Garry called, and when, presently, a servant answered the phone, he asked for Ellen, Katherine's personal maid.

At first the elderly butler, Manners, hesitated about calling her, but when he understood that it was Garry who called, he hastened to summon the maid.

The servants all knew him, of course. They had been with the Kendalls long enough to know all the friends of the family; and they speculated, as servants always do, about Katherine's suitors. The society periodicals are read more interestedly in the servants' quarters than they are above stairs!

Ellen answered, at last, from the attachment in Katherine's room, where she had been dozing. Having been Katherine's nurse, in the beginning, she was a person of some importance in the household, and enjoyed privileges; she likewise rendered service that no ordinary lady's maid would have considered. No matter how late Katherine was, Ellen was always at hand when she came in, to brush her hair, lay away her clothes, and tuck her in. Again and again Katherine had protested, objected, even scolded; but Ellen was always there. She made up her sleep in naps at odd hours. As she got older, she found that she really didn't need much sleep.

"Hello?" she called now, in some alarm. Just waking out of a sound sleep, she was a little confused, and could not immediately grasp who was calling and what purpose was behind the call.

"Hello," said Garry. "This is Garret Carpenter speaking. Is that you, Ellen?"

"Yes, sir," said Ellen. "Oh, Mr. Carpenter! There's nothing wrong with Miss Katherine, I hope?"

"No," said Garry hastily, realizing that if he told her the true state of affairs, Ellen would either faint or have hysterics, and would therefore be quite unable to answer questions. "Miss Katherine has a slight headache, and she wondered if there were any more of her headache powders about!"

"Headache powders?" repeated Ellen. "*What* headache powders, sir?"

"Miss Katherine's. The kind she always takes," said he.

"Headache powders?" said Ellen again, wonderingly. "I'm sure I've no idea what you mean, sir. I don't know anything about any headache powders. I've never known Miss Katherine to take one, sir—not in all the years I've been with her. She almost never has headaches at all, to tell the honest truth, sir. Did Miss Katherine ask you to phone *me*, sir, about them?"

"Yes," answered Garry. "I guess she thought you knew about them! Perhaps she got them only lately. Has she been suffering from nerves or insomnia, do you know? Has she been to see her doctor?"

"Why, no, sir—not that I've heard of," answered the maid. "I think there must be some mistake!"

"Well, maybe," said Garry, "although it doesn't seem like her to play this kind of joke. You are quite sure she has not been in the habit of taking any small white powders? You haven't seen any about?"

"Oh, no, sir—I'm quite sure," said Ellen. "And I would *certainly* have seen them if they were here, sir! I do *everything* for Miss Katherine, you know."

"Well, never mind, then," said Garry. "I'll go back and speak to her again. If I've misunderstood, I'll call you back!"

"Very good, sir," said Ellen, and he hung up the receiver.

So Katherine was *not* in the habit of taking headache powders! If she had been, Ellen would surely have known. You can't keep things like that from a personal maid or valet. Besides, you don't try to! Lots of people take headache powders! There is no wrong in it, if you are willing to take the risk entailed. So the powder *hadn't* been a simple headache powder!

He shuddered at the only explanation left him now.

Had she deliberately taken poison? And if so, where had she obtained it? *Surely* she would not have had it against such an emergency? *Surely* she had not meditated Da Costa's murder!

And yet she had not left the restaurant! She could not have got the powder outside. She could not even have sent for it after Da Costa's death.

She must have had it about her!

This was a damaging conclusion to come to; but it seemed to Garry the only logical one.

If she had had the powder, she had contemplated the possibility of just what had occurred! She had come prepared to kill herself if things went wrong.

Katherine—a murderess!

For the first time he permitted himself to face the possibility!

Katherine—a *murderess!*

That innocent young girl — that lovely creature—frail and delicate as apple blossoms. The thought sickened him. It was too incredible—too hideous—too improbable! He could not believe it! No matter how much evidence there was to prove it, *he simply could not accept it as a fact!*

He would believe in her innocence in spite of everything! He couldn't help it! He'd believe in her and fight for her until the end—no matter what course the world took—no matter what the law ordained.

So, with a lighter heart, he left the telephone booth to make his way back to Katherine's side, and there take up his stand for all time, come what might. But just outside the booth Moffat Fielding was waiting for him.

"I want a few words with you," he said. "Joan and I have been talking, and there are some things we thought we'd like to say. Can you come back to the table for just a minute?"

Garry looked at him and responded to his boyishness.

"Certainly," he said.

They made their way back to where Joan was waiting, in silence, and there sat down. The music—the babble of voices, was deafening; but it provided a soundproof atmosphere for their little conference.

Joan, looking rather older than she had looked earlier in the evening, but sweeter, somehow, greeted him with a nod and a rather hesitating smile. She seemed a little embarrassed — as did Fielding, too — but quite earnest and sincere.

"I'm awfully glad you came," said she. "Silvers has just told us about Miss Kendall. He said we could go as soon as the doors are opened. And I'm not denying it was a relief to hear that. But we couldn't help feeling sorry for—for her—and for you. He doesn't think she's got much chance of pulling through!"

"We don't know yet," answered Garry. "I haven't given up hope!"

"That's right," said Joan. "Lots of times it's just *hoping hard* that makes things happen! There was my kid brother, given up by the doctors, and so far gone that there didn't really seem enough left of him to save. But I just wouldn't *have* it that way! I wouldn't admit it! I wouldn't believe it! I just *hoped* with all my might that they were wrong, and that he'd fool them. He was a pretty tough little youngster anyway. Always had been. And he pulled through. They said it was a miracle! But it was just *not feeling licked!* It was just *not giving in!* That was *one* of the things I wanted to tell you. That nothing is ever really finished. I knew a writer once when I first came to New York—and we were both playing in pretty hard luck those days—but he never got discouraged. I never knew any one like him that way. He used to say 'There is always another chapter!' meaning that one thing leads to another, and you never know when something that seems like rotten hard luck will lead to something *great!*"

Garry laid his hand over hers.

"You're a *knock-out,* Joan, as they say nowadays! You don't know how grateful I am to you for *wanting* to say all this to me!"

"Sometimes there's nothing you *can* do but talk," said Joan, "and talk doesn't seem to help much. But every now and then a fool is apt to get an idea that's worth trying. You never know, and Moffie and I, here—we were just thinking—"

"Yes?" prompted Garry, curiously.

"We were thinking," said Fielding, "that if she *should* come to at all, it might be a good idea to sneak her out of here before they can arrest her—and hide her away somewhere. Often, if you have time to move, you can dig out all kinds of evidence —or extenuating circumstances. And a lot can be done in the way of newspaper work to influence public opinion. And you people have got money at your disposal."

"You see, the main thing," said Joan,

" is not to let them think she tried to kill herself. Rather let them think she just broke down at the idea that any one suspected *her*—and you took her away to protect her from the annoyance and so on. You know they're going to arrest her and put her in jail if you leave her here, and because she's rich and well connected the authorities won't dare let her out on bail. Public would howl if they did, and say they were showing favoritism and getting paid well for it. Rich people nowadays are apt to get a harder deal from the law than poor ones. I'd do that if I were you! I'd grab her and beat it—and hide her away so that no one can find her. Say you'll produce her at the proper time, if you like. But keep her safe from annoyance and publicity as long as you can—keep her comfortable. A girl like that could never stand the Tombs and come out the way she went in. She's too delicate! It 'd kill her!"

" But how could I get her out?" he asked, wetting his dry lips. The risk—the madness of the scheme appealed to him. And he wanted of all things to spare Katherine, too, if he could.

" Take her out the way we got out—back of that mirror," said Fielding. " I'll help, if you like. Glad to! Feel I owe you something anyway for that jab in the leg I gave you. But that was for Joan. And I'm just as strong for Joan as you are for Katherine Kendall. Well, what do you say?"

" If she comes around," said Garry impulsively, " I say yes—and thank you!"

They shook hands; and Garry felt no twinge of conscience because he was deliberately planning to circumvent the law! Love makes rascals of us all!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DAWN BEGINS TO BREAK.

MEANWHILE, in the little office where Katherine lay unconscious, Dr. Welland watched with set jaw and steady, resolute eyes. Often a man's opportunity comes and goes before he has recognized or grasped it; but Dr. Welland knew that this was his big chance! If he could only bring the girl through! It meant a few of the luxuries of life for his wife and children—a few hours of ease for himself—the freedom to develop his especial talents. If he could only bring her through!

He had given a hypodermic to stimulate the heart action as soon as Garry had returned with his emergency kit. And he was waiting for the stimulant to take effect, his hand on her pulse, his sharp eyes never leaving her face.

The cloak-room maid studied him curiously. To her the drama of the affair was all that mattered. She managed to get on quite nicely with her wages and tips, as her wants were simple, and she was happy because she had no ambition, save to find out as much as she could about everybody's affairs. She couldn't imagine why Dr. Welland was so *worried* about Katherine's condition, and so anxious to bring her back to consciousness. For her part, she thought that any one that wanted to die had a perfect right to do so! Certainly it was nobody's business! And having heard what a fast lot the rich are, anyway, she ventured to think that Miss Kendall probably had good and sufficient reasons for wanting to chuck everything. However, she did whatever Dr. Welland told her, willingly enough. To have crossed him might have been to earn her dismissal from the room, and she was delighted to be on the spot where things were happening. She was just a starved creature, whose monotonous existence bred in her an abnormal interest in other people's lives. So she, too, watched Katherine's white face, and waited for her to come to and speak her mind—or for her to die and Garry to come and be told.

But neither of these dramatic happenings occurred as she might have wished. Katherine was still lying motionless when Garry returned; but she was not dead. Her bosom, underneath the blue-green folds of chiffon, rose and fell evenly as she breathed, and in her white throat an artery could be seen throbbing as her heart beat. She was not dead, but very, very near it—or so he thought as he came in quietly and stood looking down at her with misty eyes.

His wild plans—formed under the influ-

ence of Joan's enthusiasm—seemed fantastic as he looked at Katherine.

"Any change?" he asked Dr. Welland huskily, striving hard to control the emotion that the sight of her aroused in him.

"I think so—a little," said Welland. "It seems to me the heart action is responding slightly to the stimulant I have administered."

"You think there is a chance, then?"

Dr. Welland nodded.

"I think there is," he said, and then—"See! The sound of our voices reaches her. Perhaps if you call to her now you can induce her to make an effort to arouse herself! Try!"

Garry leaned over her, trembling, and called:

"Katherine!"

Her eyelids flickered, but they did not open; otherwise she did not stir.

"*Katherine!*" he cried again, more loudly, more intense.

At that she opened her eyes slowly, and gazed up at him. She was dazed, bewildered, but quite conscious; they saw that at a glance. Dr. Welland motioned him to speak again.

"Are you better?" he asked.

She nodded. "What happened? Did I faint?" she asked, in a voice that scarcely carried to their ears.

"It was the headache powder," said Garry.

She frowned, trying to remember, and looked confused. Her eyes wandered about the little office. It was plain she was trying to connect up her fragments of memories.

"When you ran away from Stuyvie Nettleton on the dance floor, and broke through the palms—you remember," said Garry, "you sat down at a strange old man's table and took a headache powder. Didn't you?"

She shook her head.

"*No,*" she answered more strongly. "My head wasn't aching! I was just tired out, and faint. I felt myself going, and I was frightened. I'd never fainted before. He gave me some brandy, but it was no use."

"And you *didn't* take a powder? You are *quite sure?*" he persisted.

"Oh, quite," she said. "I should certainly remember!"

She raised herself in the big chair and shook back her damp hair.

"I feel so awfully weak," she murmured—"frightfully weak. What is it, do you think?"

Her dark eyes were fixed on Garry.

"Shock, most likely," said Dr. Welland comfortingly. "You'll be yourself again presently. Just lie still for a moment or two."

She lay back, frowning anxiously into space—worried.

"This is Dr. Welland," said Garry, "who has been attending you since your collapse!"

She smiled faintly at the doctor and then at the cloak-room maid, who was sitting motionless, all ears.

"I hope I haven't been a nuisance," she said. "Can't imagine how I came to faint. I've never been known to before!"

Dr. Welland took her pulse again.

"Excellent," he said; "growing stronger every minute!"

She looked at Garry.

"Have you accomplished anything?" she asked, "in regard to—*him?*"

Her eyes indicated the floor above where Da Costa lay.

"I'll tell you when you are stronger. You are not to worry about it in the meantime," he said.

"That means you have not accomplished anything?" she said.

"May I have a few words with Miss Kendall alone, doctor?" asked Garry. "Do you think it will upset her?"

"It would be wiser not to excite her," said Welland. "Her heart seems to have undergone some sort of strain! I tell you frankly, I did not at first anticipate such a speedy recovery."

"I think I can relieve her mind," said Garry.

"Oh, in that case—" smiled Dr. Welland. "I'll just go back and say a few words to my wife. I abandoned her, you know, without warning when Mr. Silvers came for me!"

"You have been very good," said Garry. "We shall not soon forget!"

"That's all right," said Dr. Welland awkwardly, and he departed hurriedly—a little awkwardly—his heart leaping. And there were tears in his eyes as he confided to Mrs. Welland that he had attended Miss Kendall and felt that he had really made good. And that was before the whole truth was out, too—before it was discovered how near death she really was. But Mrs. Welland had got over being surprised at his miracles. If he had made the dead to walk it would have been no surprise to her. The part of it that concerned her always was the fee. She supposed, in this instance, that it would be something handsome, owing to the Kendall millions, and she forthwith began to spend it—in her mind. But she did not lavish it on diamonds or pearls as some wives might have done. It all went for new rugs and a lamp and some glassware that she needed badly. She was, you see, worth the sacrifice that Welland had made for her.

As the doctor departed, Garry looked significantly toward the cloak-room maid, who seemed disposed to linger.

"I don't think you need wait any longer, thank you," he said. And he took the liberty of slipping her a good-sized bill.

"Thank *you,* sir," said she. "But I don't feel I ought to take this, seeing as I'd have to tell the truth if they put me on the stand and say I saw Miss Kendall come out of the room and all!"

"I *want* you to tell the truth! Don't for an instant imagine that I would attempt to induce you to do otherwise," said Garry. "As for the money—it is merely a small acknowledgment of our indebtedness to you for your kindness during Miss Kendall's faint."

"Oh, in that case, I'm sure I'm much obliged, sir," said the woman, and tucking the bill into her pocket, vanished.

Garry looked at Katherine.

"Are you stronger?" he asked. "Strong enough to leave this place with me now?"

"Can we leave it?" she asked tremulously.

"Yes!"

"You mean they're convinced that it wasn't I who—who killed him?"

"No, unfortunately, I don't quite mean that! I simply mean," said Garry, "that the whole thing is still a hopeless muddle; but *I believe in you,* and I'm going to take you away—out of it—until it's cleared up! They might try to hold you! They might try to imprison you! And I won't have it! Later on, if they want you to come back and stand trial, I'll produce you! But the best detectives and lawyers we can get will have the case in hand before then. In the meantime—we're going to Italy!"

"To Italy?" gasped Katherine, wide-eyed. "You and I?"

"If you will go with me," he said. "I have already got the tickets and the cabin *de luxe.* The steamer sails at dawn. Will you marry me and come?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"YOU WERE THE WOMAN I LOVED."

EARLIER in the evening, when Napoleon had produced the tickets to Italy that he had been sent to procure for Da Costa, Garry had taken them in order to examine them more closely, and they were still in his pocket. His hand had rested on them accidentally as he was talking to Katherine, and suddenly, and very simply, the question of their flight was settled.

They could be married and off for Italy before any one knew. Napoleon had already arranged for the sailing—under other names. And the steamship authorities would never discover that he and Katherine were not the friends for whom Napoleon had so graciously obtained accommodations.

"Well?" he asked, gazing straight down into her troubled eyes. "Will you?"

She caught her breath sharply.

"You'd trust me enough for *that?*" she asked. "You love me enough to *believe* in me in spite of all the evidence—to make yourself an outcast for *my* sake—to defy the law?"

He smiled.

"My dear," he said simply, "I love you with all my heart, and with all my strength, and with all my soul. No one was ever loved more."

"But I am so unworthy of such love," said the girl, dropping her fluffy head, her eyes filling with tears.

"You are the most wonderful person in the world to me," he said. "You are the woman I love!"

She smiled at him then with quivering lips, and her eyes shone.

"Some day, perhaps," she said, "a long, long time from now, I'll be able to make up to you for what you've done for me tonight! If not, it will not be because I haven't tried. I'm going to begin now and keep trying. I'm going to devote myself to you—*only* to you in all the world. I'm going to be one with you as never any woman was one with a man before. Not *Ruth*. Not *Juliet*. Not anyone! I'm going to be heart of your heart—and soul of your soul! *Yours* forever—in this world and *all* the worlds—so long as life lasts!"

"My dear," he said very tenderly, and took her in his arms.

She cried a little as he held her close, but her tears were not for grief nor pain nor terror now. She felt that she had never known such calm content—such peace—such comfort. Here she was safe, she knew, no matter what might come.

And she thrilled to the touch of his lips on her forehead and her eyes.

It was Moffat Fielding who presently knocked on the door and brought them back to a realization that time was passing and they had much to do.

"Well?" he asked, putting in his head when they called for him to enter. He came in quietly and shut the door and placed his back against it. "Have you decided?"

"Yes," said Garry quietly, "we are going!"

He nodded complete approval.

"*Good!*" he cried with honest conviction. "Joan has everything planned for you. Figured it out while you were talking it over. She says you can have Miss Kendall's maid meet you at the steamship dock with her things; the maid can pack and go there, you see, while we're knocking out a minister in Jersey."

"Jersey? Why Jersey?" asked Katherine.

"Because you need a license here. Joan and I will come as witnesses. And if you mean to go—you'd better do the phoning quickly. Silvers is not about now, but he may turn up any minute to complicate things."

"*I'll* phone Ellen," said Katherine.

"Are you strong enough?" asked Garry.

"Quite! And she'd be alarmed if she did not speak to me personally. I've got to tell her what to bring, too. I want my nicest things—my most becoming ones."

Garry smiled, and called the number for her, and she was presently in conference with Ellen, who adored Garry, and thoroughly approved of any wedding plans that included him. She had been more worried than any one else over her baby's interest in Da Costa. So she went about her hurried packing now with a light heart and a song on her lips, despite the lateness of the hour. She was an unusual maid.

"What next?" asked Garry of Fielding, as Katherine finally hung up.

"If you've got a valet, arrange about your things. Then write a note for Miss Kendall's brother. Better to notify him that way, Joan thinks, so there won't be so much fuss."

"I quite agree," said Katherine. "He'd certainly insist that I stay and face the music—for the sake of what people might think of my running away. But I—I want to be romantic this once, even if it *is* foolish! I want to elope with the man who wants me whether I'm a murderess or not! Afterward, if we must come back and see this thing through, we will. But we shall have a little happiness first. Eh, Garry?"

"A great deal of happiness," said Garry. And then, almost sternly: "Write your note to Jack, now, while I phone my man!"

She sat at Silvers's big desk and wrote it on a big sheet of Silvers's paper. The heading was a playing card, heavily embossed in colors—the King of Clubs.

"My darling Jackie:" she wrote. She had addressed him in that way since his early college days.

I am running away with Garry—and we're going to be married. I can't tell you where we are going because it is better, for the present, that you be unable to give the au-

thorities any assistance whatever! However—I'm coming back to face the music, later, if they don't find the *real* murderer in the interim. No need to tell you that, surely—or that I am innocent of any wrongdoing whatever! You see, I've just found out that I've loved Garry all along—never, never any one else—and I'm not going to waste any more time! I'm going to live and love at last—as I've always wanted to. And, Jack—I've an idea, now, that it's all the same thing; loving *is* living.

Until we meet again—and always—always,
Your devoted sister,
KATHERINE.

She folded it and looked up, to find both men waiting.

"Next?" she asked.

"Next," said Fielding, "we must send for Silvers."

"Send for Silvers?" echoed Garry. "What's the idea of doing that?"

"Joan said to. Thinks we ought to leave Silvers and Charlie locked up here while we make our get-away through the mirror. Then they can't interfere until it's too late."

"That's right," agreed Garry. "Silvers raised a row with me when I started out before for the doctor's emergency bag. But how are we going to keep them here?"

"That's my job," said Fielding. "You two go and get your coats and things. You'll find Joan in the ladies' room waiting for you, Miss Kendall. And you might bring my hat and coat also, if you will," he added, offering Garry the check. "When you are ready, meet me near the big mirror. *You* know the one, Carpenter!"

"Yes," said Garry. "All right! Come along, Kit!"

"One thing more," said Fielding. "Just to dispose of the cloak-room maid, who is rather an uncertain person, you might send her to your brother's table with that note. But be sure you seal it first."

"I understand," said Katherine.

He opened the door then and let them out. The music was still beating and sobbing and wailing. The dancers still revolved with unabated enthusiasm, buoyed up by frequent drafts of stimulating liquors. No one paid any heed to Katherine and Garry as they mounted the steps to the dressing rooms.

"Don't be long," whispered Garry, as they separated.

"No," said the girl, nodding. She did not glance toward the door behind which Da Costa lay. That chapter of her life was ended.

In the dressing room Joan was waiting, and she hovered over Katherine as Katherine made her bridal toilette—just rouged her lips and passed the powder puff over her face; and fluffed out her bobbed hair. But there was something about her, somehow, that made her lovelier and more bride-like than all the white satins and lace veils and orange blossoms in the world could have done—something that flamed within her, lighting her eyes, and curving her smiling lips, and flushing her cheeks.

She saw it herself in her mirrored reflection—the radiance that was about her—and she hastened to send the cloak-room maid upon her errand, lest that much-too-wise and suspicious person note the improvement, too, and guess at the cause of it!

"Would you mind taking this note for me—to my brother's table?" she asked, extending the note with a bill. "I'll wait here for the answer."

"Certainly," said the woman eagerly, pocketing the bill.

She relished the mission since it sent her into the supper room, and promised her some later information regarding the Da Costa affair. And she went forth, entirely unaware that she was being got rid of.

But the moment she was gone, Katherine and Joan found Katherine's cloak and came forth to find Garry waiting on the landing. And together they descended to the great mirror that hid the little door—there to await Fielding's coming.

Fielding, meanwhile, had transferred the door key to the outside of the office door and then had sent a passing waiter to summon Silvers and Charlie. Silvers arrived first—arrived puffing with excitement and haste and anticipation—to be met by Fielding at the office door.

"Mr. Carpenter asked me to send for you," he explained. "He says he has an important disclosure to make if you will

wait for him in your office for a minute or two."

"To be sure. Thank you," said Silvers. And he went in with a nod and sank into his big chair before his desk. He was mildly surprised to find Katherine not there, but not in the least alarmed.

A moment later Charlie arrived, to be told by Fielding, outside, that Mr. Carpenter wanted to see him, and he was to be good enough to wait inside with Mr. Silvers. So Charlie likewise walked in.

"Hello? Anything wrong?" asked Silvers as Charlie appeared.

"Not that I know of," answered Charlie. "Mr. Carpenter sent for me to come here! Said he wanted a word with me!"

"With *you?* That's funny! What *for?*" asked Silvers.

"Your guess is as good as mine," said Charlie, shrugging.

They looked at each other.

"Do *you* know anything about this Da Costa affair that you haven't told us?" asked Silvers.

"No, of course not!" protested Charlie.

"Well," said Silvers, "he's taking his time about coming—and meanwhile there's no one out there in charge of the floor."

"That's right," said Charlie, frowning.

He crossed to open the door again and have a look about. It would not open.

"*Locked!*" cried Charlie, startled.

With an exclamation of rage and disgust, Silvers was out of his chair and at the door, pulling and shaking violently at the knob.

"*Hell!*" he roared; "and we walked into the trap like a couple of half wits! They've locked us in and beat it with the girl!"

And he began to kick the door with might and main.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE.

BUT long before Silvers's kicks sounded upon his office door, Fielding had rejoined Garry and Katherine and Joan near the mirror, and they had opened the door and passed out.

It was clear, and the stars were shining. A soft wind blew very fresh and sweet upon their hot faces.

"Don't trip," cautioned Garry, as they started down the narrow iron stairs; "but make the best time you can. We'll not really be safe from pursuit until we set off in a taxi down below!"

"Right!" murmured Fielding. "They'll probably raise an awful howl when they find themselves locked in. But it 'll probably take a *little* time to find a key—or break down the door. Fortunately, I had the presence of mind to bring away the key I used. I mean to present it to the bride as a wedding gift."

They were all laughing a little from the excitement and romance of the adventure as they reached the street and hailed a cab.

"Where to?" asked the chauffeur as they piled hurriedly in.

"Let's go to my place," said Joan, with a significant glance at the others, and then gave her address in a loud voice. "That," she explained, as they started, "was to throw any possible pursuers off the trail."

So presently, when they were under way, Fielding put his head out and changed the directions.

"This minister married some friends of mine in a hurry once before," said Joan. "So I know he won't raise any objections. Of course, according to law, you have to be a resident of New Jersey, but if you just *say* you are, he won't make any trouble about it, and the marriage will be just as legal. I know, because this friend of mine that he married was a New York girl, too. She was in the Follies. Aleta Lesaire! Married a Yale fellow named Kelsey. Maybe you remember the case. They only lived together seven hours and his family made her give him up."

"Made her?" asked Katherine. "How?"

"Oh, offered her so much ready cash she simply couldn't resist. So they were divorced. She's living in Paris now on the income. And you know if the marriage hadn't been legal his family would never have given up all that coin!"

"I would have liked being married by my own dear minister," said Katherine, sighing; "with bridesmaids and ushers and everything."

"But there isn't time for that," said Garry. "And besides—the *way* you do it doesn't matter so much, does it? It's *getting married* that's important!"

"Of course," said Katherine, smiling. Their eyes met in a long, long look.

"Have you got a ring that you can use?" asked Joan.

"Yes," answered Garry, holding it out. "This one that I wear."

It was a star sapphire, set very simply in a heavy band of platinum and gold—a ring that his mother had given him years before, and that possessed tender associations for him. Katherine knew this, and her eyes filled.

"You can get a regular wedding ring afterward, of course," said Joan. But Katherine shook her head.

"No, I shall wear this one always," she said.

They crossed in the ferry to the Jersey side, Joan and Fielding leaving the lovers alone during the crossing. And, cuddled against him in the dimness of the taxi, Katherine said to Garry:

"They have been very good to us, you know. I wish we could do something for them!"

"Maybe we can," he reflected. "What would you like to do?"

"Anything that would make them happy," said Katherine. "I'd like them—I'd like *every one* to be as happy as I am tonight!"

"Hush," he said, drawing her close. "I'm *trying* to think about Fielding and Joan."

And when they came back again, as the boat neared the Jersey shore, Garry said:

"Listen, you two! I've got a suggestion to make! Why not make it a double wedding?"

"You mean *us?*" asked Joan, with a glance toward Fielding.

"Yes. He adores you. And you need him. Why don't you take a fresh start—you two—and try it out together—helping each other?"

Fielding drew a long breath.

"She deserves a better man than I am," said he huskily.

"No, no! I'm not the kind of girl men marry! You know I'm not!" said Joan.

"Personally," said Garry, "I think you would make a go of it together. And Katherine and I would like to see you try it! We'd be glad to lend a hand, too."

Fielding and Joan looked at each other, while the other two held their breath, and suddenly—instinctively—they kissed. And then both girls cried a little over this turn of affairs. All in all, it was rather an exciting and unexpected sort of night.

The Rev. Mr. Tilldon was asleep when the taxicab finally drove up to his front door, and it took quite a good deal of pushing on the front-door button before he was induced to wake up and come down. But he appeared in time, with a coat over his nightgown, and listened with surprising good humor to the wedding plans outlined to him. He was, in fact, one of those amazing people who can wake out of a sound sleep without being in the least cross or irritable; and his stout wife, whom he roused out when he hurried upstairs for a more complete and clerical attire, proved to be no less cheery and even more approving. She busied herself cooking ham and eggs and making coffee while the two weddings were in progress, so that a wedding breakfast awaited them when the knots were finally tied.

They were married in the quaint old-fashioned drawing-room—just standing opposite the Rev. Mr. Tilldon and facing him simply — Katherine and Garry first, with Joan and Fielding as witnesses—then Joan and Fielding, with Katherine and Garry signing their married names for the first time to Joan's certificate.

And as Garry took his wife into his arms and kissed her for the first time, there was no trace of regret or misgiving in his heart—only a great happiness. He always liked to remember that afterward.

They had had no time to think of a wedding breakfast, but it was ready for them when they were ready for it; all set out on a snowy covered table in Mrs. Tilldon's dining room. Ham and eggs, and crisp buttered toast, and home-made jams and jellies, and delicious coffee with thick cream to go into it.

And the Tilldons ate heartily with them, just as though they had not already had half a night's sleep. And Mrs. Tilldon told how she had made it a point to be ready at any hour of the day or night to meet the requirements of her husband's profession; and Mr. Tilldon told several amusing stories about hasty marriages that he had been called on to perform. And toasts were drunk to the brides and grooms just as enthusiastically as though the coffee cups had been flagons of ale or goblets of rare old wine.

Then they paid Mr. Tilldon a fee that made him hug fat Mrs. Tilldon ecstatically after they were gone; and they set out again for New York and the wharf from which the steamship Queen of Italy was to sail.

Ellen was there, waiting, with a big trunk and various bags belonging to Katherine. And not far off was Garry's man with his things. Garry sent him on board with the tickets and the luggage, impressing upon him first, however, that it was Mr. and Mrs. Paul Sorrel who were sailing. Those were the names under which Da Costa had had Napoleon book his passage.

Then Garry and Katherine turned to take leave of Fielding and Joan. The two girls kissed; the two men shook hands heartily.

"Don't forget," said Garry. "See Mr. Kendall the first thing in the morning, and tell him how to reach us if the necessity arises. And if Katherine is still under suspicion, see that the best detectives and lawyers obtainable are employed to look after her defense. And tell nobody but John Kendall of our whereabouts. You two are the only ones who know. Nobody else must find out until we are ready. We must vanish—as though the earth had opened up and swallowed us!"

"Right," said Fielding; "I get you. And you can depend on me. I'll never be able to—to square things with you for—for fixing it up for Joan and me to-night. But I want you to know I—I'll never forget it!"

Then Garry and Katherine climbed the gangplank, and stopped at the top to wave back to Joan and Fielding until they were out of sight.

The Queen of Italy was not quite ready to weigh anchor, however, and as Ellen appeared to report that their cabin was in readiness for them, and that no difficulties had been encountered in obtaining accommodations for herself and Garry's valet, they felt free to linger a bit by the rail, breathing in the early morning air, reveling in the vague dreamlike quality of the scene spread out before them.

It was not quite light yet—just grayish-blue, with a hint of coming gold along the horizon, and here and there a faint splash of turquoise or lavender or rose color. And a mist hung over everything, obscuring outlines, lending an air of mystery.

They stood side by side—very close together—with their arms linked.

"What an ending to this night of horror," whispered Katherine. "Life *is* wonderful, isn't it? I'm so glad one cannot see ahead! It would be so dull and dreary to *know* just what was in store for one in a day or two—in a week—or a year! To think—when I entered the King of Clubs to-night—*this* was coming! But I hadn't the least idea! I shouldn't have understood how much it was to mean to me, *then,* if I *had* been told! Because I didn't know how much I could care for you then! I didn't appreciate you! I hadn't needed you — I hadn't suffered! It's a strange thing; but without to-night's *horrors,* you know, I don't think there *could* have been to-night's joys."

"It does seem, doesn't it, as if everything comes at the appointed time," he agreed. "But of course one never has patience or philosophy enough to just wait calmly. To-night at dinner it seemed to me that I had loved you all my life—without ever being able to stir an answering love in your heart—without ever making any progress. And I was getting discouraged."

"And *now,*" she said, looking up at him, "you've won me—for *yours*—for all time to come! Are you happy?"

"I'm the happiest man in the world," said Garry.

And then, as he bent down to kiss the

lips she raised to him, a whistle blew, a bell began to ring. And the Queen of Italy started slowly for the open sea.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FLIGHT INTO FAIRYLAND.

NAT SILVERS had hardly begun to kick violently upon the door of the little office in which he was locked, when he was assailed by calmer second thought, and he stopped.

"What a damned fool I am," he cried. "I must have a duplicate key in my desk! Is the keyhole clear?"

Charlie stooped with dignity to ascertain.

"Yes," he reported hopefully.

Thereupon Silvers crossed hastily to his desk, unlocked it, and rummaged through the small drawer devoted to his collection of keys. His search was speedily rewarded. There *was* another key to the office door, and it fitted the lock to a nicety. Since both lock and key were new, this was nothing short of a miracle. The disappointing part of the proceedings was that it did not unlock the door at once. Both Silvers and Charlie became hot and impatient over the struggle before the trick was finally turned and they found themselves free again.

Outside, nobody appeared to have missed them. Waiters were scurrying about attending to the patrons' numerous wants; the band was playing; dancers whirled about the floor; men and women laughed and chattered and smoked.

From the doorway to the supper rooms they surveyed the assemblage, but caught no glimpse of Garry, or Katherine, or Fielding or Joan.

"Unless I miss my guess," growled Silvers, "they've gone—and left me to notify the police and explain!"

"But they can't hide the girl away so that she can't be traced—not if she's guilty," declared Charlie. "She's too well known! Why, her photographs have been published in every magazine and newspaper in the country that prints photographs! That's one thing that can't be done! Nobody can disappear!"

"*Hell,*" growled Silvers, "thousands of girls disappear in this country every year, and are never traced nor accounted for! And this Garry fellow has got brains! And a damned good start on the police!"

"Well—what shall we do now?" asked Charlie.

"I don't suppose it's any use trying to catch them," muttered Silvers. "They made their get-away—and they made it clean! They're not going home to wait for us to come after them or send the bulls! They're going to make tracks for *cover!* I can figure *that* out! Nobody in this town is going to see or hear from Carpenter or the Kendall girl for many a long day. No, I guess the wisest thing I can do now is—send for the police!"

"All right, then," said Charlie. "I'll go back on the floor!"

Silvers returned to his office. He sat down at his desk, opposite the picture of his wife and baby, and regarding them with melancholy eyes, called the central office.

"Hello," he said when he was finally connected. "Central office?"

"Yes," said the voice at the other end.

"Well, this is Nat Silvers talking—at the King of Clubs."

"Yes," said the voice on the wire; "anything wrong there?"

"Yes," said Nat. "Send a man up—but you'd better send one with a lot of common sense and good judgment. I've got the place full of patrons and I don't want a panic."

"All right," said the voice from headquarters. "But what's it all about?"

"Murder!" answered Silvers. He heard the voice repeat the word and whistle and hang up the receiver with a bang; and he hung up *his* receiver, and leaned back, gloomily, fumbling for a cigar. When he found one to his liking, he bit off the end viciously. And he went on chewing it while he waited.

A man's point of view will alter with circumstances. It is well known that a pedestrian cursing the driver of a motor car that almost runs him down, will undergo an amazing change of viewpoint if he finds himself at the wheel of a car from which some other pedestrian is compelled to flee.

So Nat Silvers, awaiting the arrival of the police, and the investigation that must surely end his career as a restaurateur, and seal the fate of his greatest venture, the King of Clubs, was not quite the Nat Silvers who had watched his patrons entering earlier in the evening. It is not years that age one; it is experience. A man may live sixty years without growing old, and may become an old man in a single night! All this in explanation of Nat Silvers's train of thought as he sat chewing on his cigar.

Perhaps the mere physical effort entailed served a bit to tire and calm him. Certainly his irritation gradually subsided; his ill-humor gave place to a more philosophical mood.

When he had talked with Bartlett, he had avowed that the closing of the King of Clubs would ruin him financially. But this had not been quite true. Silvers had taken some chances in his day, but he was not by nature a plunger. Bartlett was a plunger. Silvers took his risks with as much shrewdness and caution as he possessed. Needless to say, then, he had invested heavily in the King of Clubs because he believed in Da Costa as a drawing card, and because he had learned from experience that such resorts, when properly run and properly patronized, were rather better than gold mines. But all of his money was not invested in the King of Clubs—and all of the money invested in the King of Clubs was not lost. The paintings, tapestries, fixtures, and furniture could all be sold. And with what they would bring, and with what he had laid by, he could easily engage in some quite lucrative and more respectable employment. After all, his son was growing up, and there was his son's position in life —his son's future to think of. Silvers had been ambitious for himself only in regard to the accumulation of wealth; but he wanted more than that for his son! A career! A respected position in society. He reflected—now that fate had decided the matter for him anyway—that now was as good a time as any to retire from the world of night resorts.

So the opening night of the King of Clubs should be the closing night as well! His wife would be pleased to have him busy in the daylight hours—as other women's husbands were—and free at night! Perhaps they could have that place in Long Island that she had always wanted—somewhere near her sister's house—only a rather more elaborate one, of course.

Nat Silvers leaned back farther in his swivel chair and lighted his cigar. Presently the smoke rings began to drift upward.

All this time Jack had been sitting at the Colemans' table with Muriel's hand in his —although nobody was supposed to see this. Driven from Katherine's side by Dr. Welland, and urged by Silvers to avoid arousing any one's suspicions concerning the night's tragedies, he had fled to Muriel for comfort and consolation. And though he was able to whisper to her only that the matter concerned Katherine, she guessed that it concerned Da Costa, too, and held his hand tightly in hers and soothed him with her calm and her silence.

The strongest men will so find comfort in their womenkind; and this Muriel knew. So she did not seek to drag forth the facts that weighed him down. She let her presence ease him, and was content with that. And she shook her head gravely at her father and the rest who were inclined to question Jack about his strange mood. So they talked among themselves and left Jack to his own thoughts. They were far from pleasant thoughts, indeed. The truth was, he felt responsible — at least in part — for the avalanche of misfortunes that had descended upon her. For had he not abandoned her utterly upon Muriel's advent? Had he not terminated their long intimacy almost abruptly? Had he not forced her to find outside, new interests to occupy her mind and her time?

Although they had been brother and sister, they had been more than that! They had been good chums, too. But only up until the time that he had met Muriel. Then, fascinated by this newer, more alluring companion, he had begun to neglect Katherine. He had stopped popping in on her for a moment's chat in the mornings before she was up! He had stopped waiting up for her when she was out late, so

that they could raid the larder together, and exchange the latest news and gossip. Only too often he was out later than she. And he never made an effort to dine at home any more the nights she was going to be in.

In short, he had dropped her on Muriel's account, although he was really discovering that now for the first time. He had not done it knowingly or intentionally, of course; but he had done it! And so had forced her to find new interests to fill her life.

What Jack could not know was that Katherine had rejoiced in the freedom conferred upon her by Jack's engagement to Muriel. So he suffered the pangs of remorse now as he thought of her lying there, white and silent, breathing with difficulty.

He told himself that he was older—he should have known better! That he had been false to the trust their parents had placed in him. That he had failed the girl just when she had most needed him. And she was paying the penalty with her reputation and her life.

It was hard to face facts like these! He *prayed* that she might recover so that he could make amends! He was willing now to make any sacrifice that might be demanded of him, if he could only secure her happiness and safeguard it! He stood ready to be a martyr to the cause, if need be—even to give up Muriel. But he clung more tightly than ever to her hand as he thought this—and held his breath. It was a terrific price to pay.

And then the maid from the cloak room slipped up behind his chair and laid an envelope before him. He recognized Katherine's handwriting on it at a glance, and lifted startled, eager eyes to see who had laid it there.

"Miss Kendall asked me to give you that, sir," said the woman importantly.

"Miss Kendall *asked* you? She is *better?*" he asked hoarsely.

"Yes, sir! She's better," answered the woman. "Looks like it must 'a' been a headache powder after all, though she says not. Or maybe shock!"

"Thank you," he said curtly, frowning, and offering her a bill.

"You're welcome," she answered, far from gratefully. It was not that the bill was too small. It was just that she seemed never to get the gratitude she was expecting.

Observing that he was waiting for her to go—that he had no intention of opening his missive while she lingered, she announced tartly:

"Miss Kendall particularly told me I was to wait for an answer!"

"Where is she?" he asked.

"In the ladies' room!"

"I'll follow you to the foot of the stairs and deliver the answer myself," he said.

At that she turned and went back slowly through the little tables to the door. She had no right there at all, really, but not having been stopped, she had seized the opportunity to have a look about. And as Charlie was even at that moment locked in the little office with Silvers, this had been quite possible. She took her time returning to the cloak room; and when she arrived there, Katherine and Joan were nowhere to be seen. She regretted this, but made the best of it, and placed herself at the door, with a good view of the stairs, so that if Jack did come looking for his sister, their interview would not escape her.

But Jack did not come. Opening the letter, he had read it swiftly, his brows going up, his eyes growing wide with astonishment and incredulous delight:

MY DARLING JACKIE:

I am running away with Garry—and we're going to be married. I can't tell you where we are going, because it is better, for the present, that you be unable to give the authorities any assistance whatever! However, I'm coming back to face the music later, if they don't find the *real* murderer in the interim. No need to tell you that, surely—or that I am innocent of any wrongdoing whatever! You see, I've just found out that I've loved Garry all along—never, never any one else—and I'm not going to waste any more time! I'm going to live and love at last—as I've always wanted to. And, Jack, I've an idea now that it's all the same thing; loving *is* living!

Until we meet again—and always—always,

Your devoted sister,

KATHERINE.

He looked up from the letter to find Muriel's dark eyes fixed on him with a world of tenderness and sympathy in their depths.

"Katherine has eloped," he said. His voice, ringing with a mingling of relief and joy and thanksgiving in it, carried further than he had intended. Down the table all eyes turned his way; and one or two heads turned at neighboring tables as stray ears caught the glad tidings.

"*Eloped?*" cried young Coleman, who was still at college, but who loved Katherine none the less passionately for that. And his tone voiced his tragedy.

"Not — not with that — not with Da Costa, surely?" cried Muriel.

"No—good Lord, no! I suspect she was only playing with him to make the man she really wanted *jealous*," said Jack.

"But who is it—*Garry?*" cried old Mr. Coleman.

"Yes, Garry," smiled Jack. And they raised their voices and their glasses hilariously, all shouting, "Garry!" and drank.

"But how did they get *out* to do it? I thought no one could get *out?*" queried old Mr. Coleman wearily.

"'Love laughs at locksmiths,' father," quoted Muriel, her heart growing lighter as she saw the gladness back in Jack's eyes. And though she never mentioned it, and he never told her, she knew that Katherine had come through some great danger that night, and by some wholly unexpected miracle had come through safe.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RETRIBUTION AND JUSTICE.

THREE times Napoleon had approached the vicinity of Bartlett's table and had seen—from a safe distance—Bartlett still sitting there, upright, to all appearances absolutely unharmed by the poisonous draft Napoleon had mixed for him. To Napoleon this was a miracle. He knew that white powder. He had obtained it from a chemist in Italy—a close friend of his. He knew its effect. True, he had carried it for years. Its potency might be to *some* extent *lessened!* But that Bartlett—a weak old man—should be able to swallow it and sit there, plainly undisturbed, was clearly impossible.

Two solutions to the problem occurred to Napoleon, after his third visit of inspection. Either he had recognized Napoleon and had thrown the draft away! Or he had given it to some one else.

His first impulse was to approach Bartlett and ascertain the truth from him. But on second thought, this task seemed too great. He could not rely upon anything that Bartlett might say. And he was averse to admitting to the old man that he had been, even for a time, completely deceived, not alone still in doubt!

The more clever way, he decided, was to discover if anybody had been taken suddenly ill. Of course he dared not ask such a question outright, lest there were inquiries started, and some one should want to know what *he* knew. Still, he could find out something, no doubt, from the boy, Mark, in the check room. Accordingly, he mounted the stairs.

"Well, Mark," he said in Italian, "how are things with you to-night, eh?"

"Better than with our friend Da Costa," said Mark grimly. "Yesterday we might have envied him; to-day he might envy us, eh? So goes the world!"

Napoleon nodded.

"To each his just deserts," he said. "What is to be, will be! And how is the other who was ill?"

Using the vague term deliberately to conceal the fact that he might be asking for a person of either sex, Napoleon waited breathlessly.

"Miss Kendall?" said Mark. "Oh, you must ask Amelia that. She keeps informed upon all matters. I am too busy here."

He nodded across the landing, indicating the maid from the ladies' room as he spoke. Napoleon saw her standing by the door.

"It is well to keep busy," he said. "Evil finds only the idle!"

And he moved off, crossing to join the woman opposite.

"Well, how is Miss Kendall now?" he asked.

"Up and off again, God knows where," said Amelia sourly. "It seems we were wrong in thinking 'twas poison she'd taken, though I never see any one look as near like dead as she looked when they carried her into Mr. Silvers's office. It must have

been a headache powder, or shock, though her breath did smell of strong liquor!"

An expression of shrewdness lighted Napoleon's eyes.

"She collapsed at the table, did she not?" he asked.

"Yes, she did—at some old man's table, it was. They were all thinking at first she'd been poisoned, or had taken it herself, but the doctor gave her a jab in the arm with something or other, and out of it she came quite nicely. She said she had taken nothing but a bit of brandy. But 'twas more than a little she had, if you ask *me!*"

He knew now that Bartlett had passed the poisoned drink on to Katherine, but whether by intent or accident did not appear; and a doctor, hastily summoned, had administered an antidote.

He was glad of that! He would not have liked the idea that an innocent girl had met death through his maneuvers, although he would have felt that Bartlett was really responsible, in any case.

The thing that bothered him, though, was that Bartlett was still unpunished. He stood frowning, deep in thought.

"Do you see *him*—going into Mr. Silvers's office there?" cried Amelia in vibrant tones, seizing hold of Napoleon's arm. "He's a police officer, if ever I see one—even if he has got on plain clothes."

Napoleon's glance followed hers.

"The police, eh?" he said meditatively.

That meant he had very litttle time to carry out any schemes he might have for personal chastisement. Unless he decided to employ the police himself in the carrying out of his plans!

There was an idea! Not to kill Bartlett himself, but to turn him over to the law—in such a way that his death must be the certain outcome! For there is no more cruel way to die than at the hands of the law! Napoleon knew that! He knew about the long trials—the arguments back and forth—the jury pondering—the imprisonment while the issue was being settled—then the transfer to the death house—and the final long delay—before the condemned man is dragged forth to sit in the death chair. He knew about those innumerable weary hours of waiting—of thinking—of hoping and abandoning hope—of resignation and despair.

Could he assure such a fate for Bartlett? If so, surely that would be a sweeter revenge than any other he could devise—far, far sweeter than the death he had originally planned—the death by the powder that failed to kill!

A waiter came hurriedly up the stairs to summon Mark, the boy from the check room, and Amelia. They were wanted at once in Mr. Silvers's office.

Napoleon guessed the reason for that! Mr. Silvers had told the police officer the story of the murder, briefly, and he was going to question the witnesses. As Mark and Amelia had seen Miss Kendall in the room with the dead man, they were summoned first.

Amelia hurriedly smoothed her hair as she flashed a lightning glance at herself in the glass.

"Will I have to appear in court, I wonder," she asked Napoleon, "and will my picture be in the papers?" She already saw herself on the front page, as she had so often seen the pictures of luckier women, and underneath, "Miss Amelia Langhankie, one of the witnesses in the Da Costa murder case!" She almost swooned with excited delight at the thought, and wished she had had time to curl her hair that night. She was conscious of a feeling of righteous indignation at her sister Minnie's oldest boy, whose dawdling in the bathroom had made it impossible for her to curl her hair. And as she followed Mark down the stairs, she recalled with a start of terror that she had almost decided to remain at the Domino Rouge when Mr. Silvers gave her her choice of staying there or moving to the new place. If she had stayed, she would have missed this!

As Amelia and Mark went down the stairs, Napoleon smiled to himself. There was nobody else about to see what he was up to, and this suited him to perfection.

He approached the door of the little French drawing-room in which Da Costa's body still lay, and tried the knob. The door was still locked. But locks did not greatly interfere with Napoleon's plans.

He strolled into the ladies' dressing room, found a hairpin on the dressing table there, and returned. Bending it deftly between his long, slender fingers, he inserted it in the lock. Twice he drew it out and altered the bends in it. And eventually the lock snapped back under his hand.

He entered the little French drawing-room, and a moment later he came forth again, with a confident, triumphant air. But in that moment he had completed his plans for the destruction of Bartlett.

Downstairs again, he sent a waiter to Mr. Silvers in the office with a message from Mr. Bartlett. The message was:

> Will you come and have a bite to eat at my table?

Silvers, in the midst of his interview with the plain-clothes man from the "murder squad," frowned a little at such a summons; but in the light of his long friendship with Bartlett, felt that he could not decline. He sent word back that he would come presently—as soon as he was free.

Then Napoleon sent a message to Mr. Bartlett. The message was:

> I am coming to have a bite of supper with you in a few moments. You order.

Mr. Bartlett wanted no food. He wanted no supper party with his old friend Nat Silvers. He just wanted to be left alone—and in peace. But he could not decline the honor thrust upon him. Wearily he scanned the menu that the obsequious waiter offered him, and selected the supper dishes that seemed to him the least unbearable. These the waiter wrote upon his pad, and the pad he presently turned over to Napoleon. His part of the game was then played out.

Napoleon made his way to Jack Kendall's table, and requested a word with that gentleman aside.

"I have reason to believe," he said, "that the identity of the man who killed Da Costa is about to be discovered. If you will come with me you will be able to see and hear exactly what occurs."

"Why—thank you," said Jack, amazed. "I can think of nothing that would please me more!"

"This way," said Napoleon, with a bow.

He lead Jack around to the palm-screened niche where Bartlett sat, all unaware of his impending danger, and there placed a chair for him.

"Quiet, please," he said, with a finger on his lips, and vanished.

Jack waited, studying curiously the elderly man in his quaint old-fashioned clothes, who sat alone at the table opposite. He wondered who the old fellow was. He wondered who Napoleon was. He felt like the audience at the play—just before the curtain goes up. He had the same feeling of elation and expectancy. Even the orchestra was there, to add to the illusion. It was playing for the fifteenth or sixteenth time that night "The Song of India." That strange song of unutterable significance — heavy with the fragrance of the East — moving with passion — terrifying with the inevitableness of things! He followed it dreamily.

And then Nat Silvers entered the little niche and took the chair opposite Bartlett's, sinking into it with a sigh.

"Well," he announced comfortably, "the police are in charge at last. And it's a great relief to me, I can tell you, to have the thing off *my* hands!"

"What did they say about not being notified sooner?" asked Bartlett curiously.

"A good deal," grinned Silvers, "chiefly profanity. But they've got to make the best of it, haven't they?"

Bartlett nodded absently.

"How is the little girl — the one who fainted at my table here?" he asked then. His voice was not quite as steady as he could have wished.

"Much better!" answered Silvers.

"*Better?*" repeated Bartlett, staring. He had accepted Napoleon's word that the brandy had contained a deadly poison—that there was no known antidote — that the girl must surely die. And he had found assurance in that of his own safety. He had been banking on her death. And she was better! Perhaps she was well enough to talk—to deny that she had taken a headache powder at his table! Perhaps she was well enough to incriminate *him*.

"So much better," went on Silvers grimly, "that she has cleared out!"

"She's — *gone? Run away?*" asked Bartlett, tremulously.

Silvers nodded.

"That fellow Carpenter has carried her off. Going to employ detectives, I guess—and keep her hidden somewhere so she can't be arrested. Oh, they'll probably fight the thing through to a finish."

Bartlett saw a new menace in all this. She must have told Carpenter that she had not taken a headache powder, and he had guessed that Bartlett must have some important reason for wanting to throw suspicion on her! Damn Napoleon and his lies! Damn the luck! It had certainly turned against him at last! If they began to suspect him—if they started to investigate, they would surely discover his connection with Da Costa—his motive for the murder. And there was his wound.

It might have been better to have owned up at the beginning, pleading self-defense! His wound would have lent color to such a plea—and there was no witness to prove whether he or Da Costa had struck first. Of course he had followed Da Costa up to the little French drawing-room; but he might have said that Da Costa had sent for him to come.

It was too late to think of all that now, though! No one would believe it now! He had kept silent too long. It was just his luck to do the wrong thing. He might have got away with it. But now his chances looked very slim. For one thing, he hadn't much energy left to fight with. He was very weak. He was worn out. The dead man, he told himself grimly, was a hard fighter.

Napoleon appeared, interrupting Bartlett's train of thought. He held a platter in his hands—a platter with a silver cover.

"Shall I serve?" he asked, placing the platter on the table before Bartlett.

And then, with a flourish, he raised the cover. With an agonized cry Bartlett sat staring. For on the platter lay the bloody knife with which Da Costa had been killed—the knife just as Napoleon had dragged it from the dead man's throat.

"*Take it away!*" babbled Bartlett, suddenly breaking. "Hide it—for God's sake! I killed him! *I killed him!* I'm licked!"

And he fell forward on the table, shuddering convulsively.

Silvers sat staring, speechless, unable to grasp what had occurred; but Jack broke through the intervening screen of palms and helped Napoleon raise the old man. As they lifted him, the napkin covering the blood stain fell away, and he opened his eyes.

"He's wounded!" cried Jack, startled.

Bartlett tried twice to speak before any sound came forth.

"Yes," he managed to whisper, finally, "this is what he did to me before I got him. But I got him!" His eyes lighted with savage joy. "And I'm mighty proud of it! He was a skunk if ever there was one. I really deserve a medal instead of what I'll probably get."

"I didn't know you even knew him," cried Silvers, dazed.

"I *made* him," said Bartlett. "I picked him up out of the gutter and made him—and he didn't play straight with me. Listen—because I'm all in—you'd better write it down in case I pass out. I've lost an awful lot of blood, you see. *I* killed him because he didn't play straight with me, and I'm glad I did it! It's one of the finest things I could have done for society at large! Have you got that down?" he asked, looking at Jack, who had taken him at his word and was transcribing the confession.

"Yes," said Jack. "I'd better put your name in it, though!"

"Henry Bartlett," said the gambler distinctly.

Jack read the following:

> I, Henry Bartlett, do hereby swear that I killed Guy da Costa because he did not play straight with me, and I feel that in doing so I have conferred a benefit upon society at large.

"Right," said Bartlett, "and just add he was a skunk!"

Jack added the line, and offered Bartlett his fountain pen.

Marshaling all his remaining strength, Bartlett signed, in quite a steady, round hand.

"Thank you," said Jack, taking the pa-

per. "And now—if you don't mind—I'd like to shake hands with you. You're a sportsman!"

Bartlett shook hands, with a little smile, and then just fell back in his chair with a sigh and died. It was a good end.

The orchestra was still playing wildly beyond the palms—the dancers were still whirling madly.

"Well," said Silvers huskily, "I guess it's about time to call it a night. Napoleon, tell them to open the doors!"

Napoleon slipped away.

"The King of Clubs," added Silvers slowly, "had a brief season, but an eventful one. I'll be glad to go into the country now and rest!"

And he turned and joined Charlie, who was standing at the doors. Outside darkness was just giving way to dawn. And the revelers, passing out, called back to him that the opening had been a great success and that they had never had a better time!

THE END.

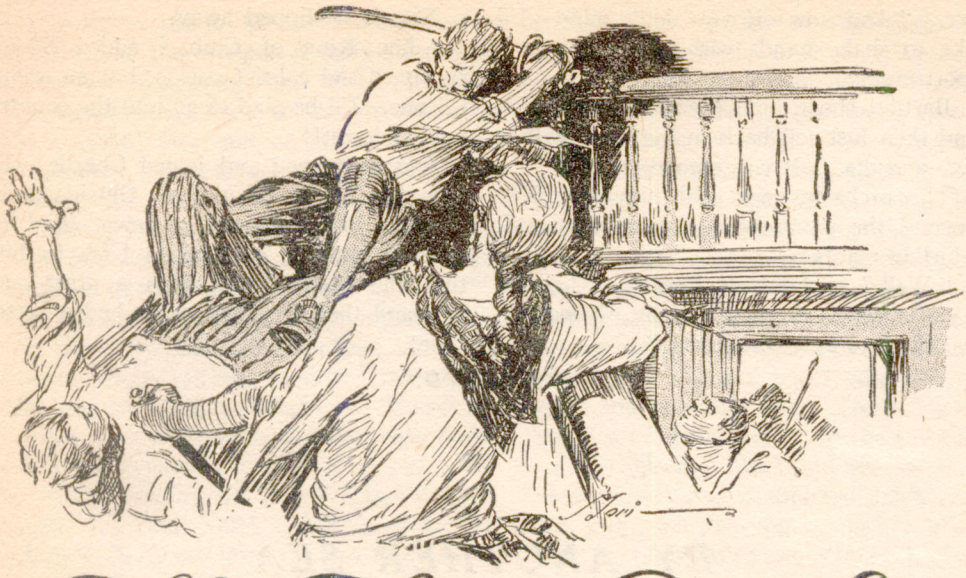
BY ANOTHER SEA

THE Western gull is whiter than a dove
Or the ungathered foam.
I close the eyelids, and again I roam
The meadowlands of forty years ago.
I see the osprey circling far above,
Come back to the old nest from Mexico,
And we are young once more, O boyhood love!

The spray of that last wave is on my face.
Time breaks. We hide again
Beneath the cedar from the April rain.
O youth's forgotten music, lost to me!
Ocean and sea wind echo now your grace;
But what one wave can tell us of the sea
Is more than all I learn of time and place.

Dear days, a little while our very own!
Dear mouth I never kissed!
The years between us gather like the mist.
It is enough to know you are no more.
It is enough to know I walk alone.
Still cries the ocean on that distant shore,
But farther than the osprey have you flown.

George Sterling.



The True Steel

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

SNARG had sent for John Peter Warriner, which was in itself a high impertinence. Worse, he had had the effrontery to ask in his dirty, ill-spelled note that Warriner come in a chaise instead of riding as was his habit. If Tobias Snarg had dared to come himself to the manor with such a request, and no prompt explanation, Warriner would have kicked him from the door; but the frightened black boy who stood on the porch, hat in hand and with the air of trying to hide behind one of the fluted columns, was not to blame.

"Tell him I'll go, and be damned to him!"

Warriner flirted the pieces of the torn note into the air and turned away. Snarg would have to offer something of unusual interest to pay for this or Warriner would thrash him in his own ill-favored house. Rum from the West Indies? Fine brandy from France? Cigars from Cuba? None of these offered excuse for the insolence.

Toby Snarg had certain dealings in Canada, as far as Quebec. He owned a sloop that sailed down Lake Champlain more often by night than by day, bringing cargoes, duty free, to northern New York. For a matter of a half dozen years, since the close of the second war with Great Britain, Snarg had done a good business with many of the landlords in the Adirondack wilderness. He confined his smuggling to luxuries and his dealings to the rich.

Warriner, of Warriner Manor, used him. Not for black purposes, as did some, but to serve such ends as were not readily to be satisfied by other means. The feeling of the time as to smuggling was loose. John Peter Warriner, of lineage that went back through English history to the Conquest, to Normandy, was something of a cynic, a little ruthless, but bound in strict allegiance to his own code of honor and to the young republic, for which he had fought at Plattsburg as his father had at Saratoga.

Snarg had said not to arrive until dark. Both the hint of mystery and the astound-

ing quality of the insolence from one who was wont to come seeking his customers had helped decide Warriner to go; he even found himself eager as he began to dress shortly before candle lighting. He would have dressed with equal care for a ball, a duel, or a dog fight.

White nankeen trousers, revealing the contours of his mighty thighs and calves, a tight coat of blue broadcloth with rolling collar and long tails, a waistcoat of flowered silk with silver buttons. He pocketed a pair of beautifully chased pistols and a packet of money—both being necessary in all dealings with Snarg.

At length Warriner was satisfied with himself; having made sure for the third time that his shirt, of linen as fine and soft as silk and worked with a multitude of pleats, was spotless. As particular as an Incroyable of the period of the Directory he, nevertheless, looked the Viking for, like nearly all Warriners, he was tall, yellow-haired, barrel-chested and pink and white. A man with whom it was exceedingly dangerous to trade blows.

Warriner leaped into his chaise without putting foot to step and gathered up the reins. The stable boy sprang away from the horse's head and the chaise left with its iron tires striking fire from the roadway. For an hour the two-wheeled vehicle swayed and bumped, and fields and forests passed in a green stream. Then Warriner pulled down his powerful horse at the residence of Tobias Snarg.

There was a curl of disgust upon his lips as he drew up in front of the big brick house, once a mansion, that Toby Snarg had acquired since his prosperity. It was dark now, night having come during the hour, but Warriner knew that the gardens were choked with weeds, the hedges untrimmed. The many windows of the house seemed like sad and hollow eyes. Dogs barked. The black boy came running to take the horse. Then the door opened and Snarg's heavy carcass appeared there with the lightness of a dancing master.

Snarg was surprising. He was gross, with iron muscles concealed beneath layers of fat. His teeth were yellow and stained, but strong as the teeth of a horse. He grinned much and the corners of his mouth turned up broadly, but his grin was as likely to prelude a knife thrust as a handclasp. Now he stood bowing and grinning, so that Warriner could see the top of his cropped poll in the light from the doorway and note how the hair grew down upon his temples and into a peak above his brows.

"Good evening to ye, sir!" he said. "Come in, sir! They's French wine waiting, Mr. Warriner, and some of the longest and blackest cigars that ever come out of Cuba!"

How Toby Snarg hated him! Warriner smiled faintly from his seat in the chaise. But he loved money more. They hated each other for no reason except that each was what he was. Snarg hated and feared and made money: and Warriner used him with a devil-may-care indifference to his venom which intensified that poison. Money! Snarg loved money even more than he hated a gentleman.

"Well, Snarg!" Warriner vaulted from the chaise and stood beside Toby, looking down into his upturned, grinning face. "You've a mighty good reason for that note, I trust?"

"Yes, sir!" Snarg led the way into the house, chuckling. "It's business to be done after dark and spoke in a whisper! You'll see why I didn't come to you, Mr. Warriner! And you'll be thanking Toby Snarg that he wrote that note to you instead of somebody else!"

They went into a room littered with guns, bits of harness, even smelling of the stable; but furnished with battered mahogany, with magnificent, tarnished silver candelabra. Odors of stale food and stale spirits. For a missing pane in one of the tall windows a piece of horse blanket had been substituted.

"Have something to drink and smoke, Mr. Warriner!" Toby waved his fat, unwashed hands at the table, where sat half a dozen cobwebbed bottles and some bundles of cigars. He poured wine and stood grinning and rubbing his ale-stained shirt front.

"I'm going to ask you to come upstairs and look at what I got for you," he said. "You look first and then we'll talk business. Here's your health, sir!"

Warriner held his glass to the light and

stared into the beautiful color a moment, frowning, before he drank with the man. Could it be that he dared plot any villainy against John Peter Warriner? He dared, but he knew that he would lose too much, Warriner decided; so he raised his glass in acknowledgment and drank.

"It must be something good to repay me for driving in that woman's go-cart," he said. "I prefer a horse's back between my legs."

"You'll see, Mr. Warriner! Five minutes more and you'll be thanking me, sir!"

Snarg took a candle from the table and fitted it to a pewter stick. Then, with a nod and a smirk, he went out into the hall and up bare stairs that creaked as though in protest at his presence there. He stopped before a door on the second floor and inserted a key in the lock, while the candle dripped tallow upon his boots.

Warriner felt for his pistols, but Snarg preceded him fairly enough into a bare room, dusty and echoing. He walked to one side of the room and ran his hand along the wainscoting. A little rectangular panel, at the height of a man's head, slid noiselessly back. Snarg looked, then beckoned and stood with his finger on his lips. With one hand resting upon the grip of a pistol Warriner went up to the opening and looked through.

He found himself gazing into a chamber similar to the one in which he stood, except that it was rather crudely furnished. In the middle of the room a girl knelt before a high-backed, splint-bottomed chair as though it were a *prie-dieu*. She was dressed in a simply made gown of some dark material. Her unbound hair, black and waving, fell over her shoulders and down to her waist. Long, black lashes swept cheeks touched with rose; her profile was clear and delicate against the light. She held a rosary and prayed in French.

"Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee"—Warriner's glance flashed about the room, there were heavy bars on the window—"pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Warriner turned away from the opening in the wall and looked into the grinning face of Snarg.

"Ain't she a little beauty, Mr. Warriner?" he whispered as he closed the panel.

"What devil's work is this, Toby?"

"A thousand dollars takes her!" Snarg balanced back on his heels complacently. "I can see you're hard hit!"

"Ah!" murmured Warriner. "New Orleans, perhaps? A touch of the tar brush? Slave-running, Toby?"

"No, sir!" Snarg wagged his head emphatically. "She's pure white, pure French, and I shouldn't wonder if she was eddicated, too! That's the trouble! I got her on my hands and I got to get rid of her some way. When my boat was coming up the St. Lawrence last trip this gal and another one was out on the river. They got upset, and the other gal was drowned, but my crew picked up this one. So fur, all right. But Cap'n Nippy Smith was drunk that day and what does he do but chuck this gal into his cabin and lock her up and forget all about it. When he come to, a couple of days later, they wa'n't nothing to do but keep her. So Cap'n Nippy brought her along to me, durn him! I made up my mind to turn her into money. She's as good as dead as far as Canada goes, and they's many a young blood, and old ones, too, that will pay for a gal like that. Give her some gowns and rings and she'll quit praying and quiet down."

"Who else knows about this, Snarg?" asked Warriner.

"Nobody but Mr. Alexander Thorne. I didn't intend to have him see her, but we was drinking pretty hard here last night, and you know how wild he is, Mr. Warriner. He was running all over the house, and he tried her door and she screamed. Then I had to show him. He ain't got a shilling to his name or he'd have bought her. He was clean crazy to have her."

"Why offer her to me, Toby, in preference to any one else?"

"Fair question, Mr. Warriner, and I'll tell ye. You don't get crazy drunk like some gentlemen we both know. You don't talk. You got the money to pay cash. I had plenty experience with gentlemen's notes. It's turrible risky for me to keep her now anybody knows she's here. Thorne 'll be back. He begged and threatened. If

she's gone he can't do anything. You see the way I'm fixed, don't ye?"

"I'll take her," said John Peter Warriner. He drew out a morocco billfold. "Here's part of your money. Come for the rest to-morrow. Unlock the door and order my chaise at once."

"Glad you come, hey?" chuckled Snarg as his fingers closed upon the money. They went out into the hall, he turned the key in the door of the girl's room and then went creaking downstairs to order the chaise. Warriner lifted the latch and stepped inside.

The girl had sprung up at the first sound, evidently. Now, pale as death, she backed slowly to the wall.

"*Bon soir, mademoiselle!*" Warriner spoke as gently as he could. "I have come to help you."

"Oh!" She lifted her arms to heaven. "Thank God you speak French! Deliver me from this terrible place, *monsieur!* From that terrible man! From the drunken *monsieur* who was here last night! From everything! Take me back to my home in beautiful Canada. God and His angels will reward you!"

"Be tranquil, *mademoiselle,*" said Warriner. "You are going to leave this place with me, and at once!"

She ran toward him with hands outstretched, like a frightened child. Warriner sprang and caught her as she pitched forward, fainting. He lifted her and went downstairs with her slender body limp in his arms and her head upon his shoulder. Snarg met him, smelling of fresh spirits.

"All ready!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Nice little armful, but I'm durned glad to see the last of her. Be after the rest of the money to-morrow, sir!"

Without replying Warriner climbed into the chaise, gathered up the reins in one hand, and drove for home as though the devil were after him.

Limp and warm and helpless against his heart. Toby Snarg was right. He had been hard hit. John Peter Warriner, a young gentleman of fortune who had made the grand tour, who knew his Horace and thought in terms of the eighteenth century philosophy, had succumbed to the black velvet eyes and pearl tinted skin of a little Canadienne. No, it was neither the skin nor the eyes. It was that flame of life within her which burned with a light just a little different from every other flame of life in the world. She, no doubt, would call it her immortal soul. Warriner accepted the inevitable, and joyously. After a time she stirred, and her arms clung to him.

"My father!" she whispered. "Ah—but I have had a bad dream! *Mon Dieu!*"

She cried out and struggled as she came fully to herself. Warriner held her as gently as he could.

"You have nothing more to fear *mademoiselle,*" he said. "Very soon you shall be quite comfortable."

He felt her crying softly, heard the broken murmur of her prayers, and then they drew up before the pillars of the manor. He carried her into the drawing-room and put her down in a great velvet-upholstered chair. He lighted every candle, so that polished furniture and brasses gleamed. He stood by the fireplace and looked down at her. She was a rare gem in a worthy setting.

"*Mademoiselle,*" he said, "I am John Peter Warriner, and this is Warriner Manor. Will you tell me who you are?"

She had recovered a degree of self-possession now—a really marvelous reaction after what she had been through. Her fear seemed to have gone.

"I am Mlle. Marianne Fortier," she said, "of Quebec. We were at our villa on the St. Lawrence above the city when my friend Alma-Rose was drowned and those men picked me up. The captain was drunk, and he could not speak French, anyway. I was helpless. My father would have paid them. I suppose they were afraid—"

"Yes," agreed Warriner. "They are smugglers."

He stood looking down at her in silence. Very likely his heart was in his eyes, for Mlle. Fortier shot an uneasy glance at him.

"*Monsieur,*" she said, "you are a gentleman. You are going to send me home, aren't you?"

Now within John Peter Warriner stirred a little something of the spirit of those far ancestors of his who rode with drawn sword

from end to end of Saxon England. Here was the woman who had been his own from time immemorial, he felt.

"Mlle. Marianne," he said, "you are free. We are twenty miles from Port Franklin, on Lake Champlain, and from there I shall take you by boat to Canada. Most certainly I should free any woman whom I found in your situation. The easiest way was to buy you, as I did, for Snarg would have been capable of killing you if he had thought there was danger from the officers of the law. All that, however, is nothing. What concerns me greatly is that I have loved you from the moment when I looked into that room and saw you at your prayers."

"*Dieu Seigneur!*" she cried. "Is all the world gone mad? First that drunken captain steals me! Then a tall, dark gentleman, also very drunk, asks me to marry him! Then the fat man sells me as a slave! Now you, *monsieur,* say that you love me! What kind of love is it, *monsieur,* that speaks so quickly?"

"It is an honorable love, *mademoiselle.* It carries with it my name and fortune. I shall ask you to marry me. I do now."

"Utterly mad!" she exclaimed. "Do you know what you are saying? This is a serious thing—marriage! Or do you mock me? Are you no better than those others? I do not love you! I will not marry you! Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

"Pardon!" said Warriner grimly. "You think I am mad—and perhaps you are right. You do not trust me. *Parbleu!* Because I have asked you to be my wife you do not trust me."

He reached above the marble mantelpiece and took down from the wall a long dagger with a hilt of rough and very old workmanship. He dropped it point downward so that it quivered in the polished boards at her feet.

"There is true steel, *mademoiselle.* It was carried by a Crusader, one of my ancestors. Tradition says that it will fight only in a holy cause. Take it, and if I do not take you safely home as I have promised, use it on me!"

Warriner thought bitterly that he had made a fool of himself, and was still making a fool of himself. Rash, as always, plunging to the undoing of his own happiness. He watched her take the dagger and lay it in her lap, shaking her head.

"I do believe that you will take me home, *monsieur,* for you have a good heart. But while I am in this part of the world where all men are insane I shall keep it for protection."

"You will want to go to your room," said Warriner quietly now. "Come *mademoiselle.* I will call my housekeeper."

He held the door open. She rose. In ten minutes she had been made comfortable in the best of the guest chambers, and Warriner was alone in his library struggling to get a grip upon the most difficult situation he had ever faced. He cursed himself for his crashing haste. He would send to Port Franklin and find out the time of the first boat north. He was in honor bound to take her on that boat, but he was determined to make the most of every moment with her that was his.

The next morning John Peter Warriner paced the drawing-room, waiting for her to appear. Already he had sent one stable boy with an armful of fresh cut roses to her room and another to Port Franklin for information. He turned and bowed as she entered, and his heart sank as he saw that she did not wear one of his flowers. She had brought the dagger.

"I do not need this, *monsieur,*" she said, after she had replied to his greeting. She placed it upon a little table. "We were both, I think, quite foolishly excited last night."

"I am of the same mind, Mlle. Marianne," said Warriner; "but—I have sent to find out about your boat—"

He broke off at a sudden look of terror upon her face. Toby Snarg was standing in the doorway. Warriner saw red, and for a moment was speechless with rage.

"You!" he cried. "How dare you come into my house like that?"

"Now, Mr. Warriner," expostulated Snarg uneasily. "I didn't see nobody, and I'm in a mighty big hurry—a mighty big hurry!"

"Oh!" Warriner managed to control himself. He walked to a desk and counted

out some bills and coin from a drawer. "There's what you're after. Now go, and don't come into my house like that again unless you want to get kicked out."

Snarg grew darkly red, but he did not move. He stood with the money in his hand.

"I got something to say about her," he announced at length.

"Very well," replied Warriner, after a second's hesitation. "Make it brief."

"Alexander Thorne got me out of bed afore daylight this morning," said Snarg sullenly. "He's got hold of some money some way, and he wants that gal. I'll give you back your thousand, Mr. Warriner, and another with it, for her—"

"Get out!" barked Warriner.

"Twenty-five hundred, cash—"

John Peter Warriner struck a beautiful blow, starting his fist without warning movement and sending it crashing against Snarg's jaw. Heavy man that he was, he went back against the wall with such force that the sturdy timbers of the house trembled.

What followed seemed to happen all at once. A cry from Marianne, a glimpse of Snarg reeling toward the table where the dagger lay, and then a flash of steel as he caught it up and sprang to strike.

Warriner threw up an arm, but the blow never fell. The next instant Toby Snarg was sprawling on the floor, his feet tangled in a rug over which he had tripped. The dagger slid away from his hand.

Warriner drew a pistol. Snarg got up and began to back toward the door.

"We'll get that gal!" he promised, and flashed out of the door as Warriner fired. The bullet drove into the wall. Warriner leaped to a window in time to see Snarg riding away. He turned to Mlle. Fortier, smiling.

"He wanted to buy you back, *mademoiselle!* Truly, you are a very valuable person!"

She had picked up the dagger and stood looking at it.

"*Monsieur,*" she said, "it is indeed true steel! It will not fight in an evil cause. Did you see how he fell? No evil can come near you while you have it."

"I would rather have my saber," he laughed. "Or a brace of pistols!"

But Marianne Fortier was impressed, and it was almost with reverence that she put the dagger back on the table. Warriner had other matters to think of. The stable boy returned with the information that a boat making the trip into Canadian waters would leave the following night.

Until that time it was necessary to bear in mind Snarg and his patron, Alexander Thorne. Thorne was unscrupulous, evidently supplied with money, and as genuinely in love as he could be. That he had mentioned marriage had proved that. Snarg was moved by his own great passion, greed. And greed was bolstered by long hatred and fresh desire for vengeance.

Warriner gave orders to his foreman, Tim Creagan, a stout and loyal fellow, to set a guard that night. Then he loaded his rifles and fouling pieces and got out the heavy cavalry saber that he had carried in the war of '12. This he left in the library, but he resolved that his pistols would stay in his pockets, loaded, until he and Marianne Fortier were safely at the home of her father. He resolved to mount his half dozen men and arm them for a guard when he went to Port Franklin the next afternoon.

Hours passed, however, and there was no sign of a return of Snarg. Warriner devoted himself to Mlle. Fortier; but to-day, having become thoroughly herself, she was cool, aloof, charming, kind. It seemed that John Peter Warriner was to make no further progress for the present, if at all. Silently he cursed himself for having thrown away through his impulsiveness what prestige he might have gained from the rescue.

That afternoon storm clouds began to gather. Warriner and Mlle. Fortier stood upon the porch and watched the blue-black mass form low over the mountains; listened together to the distant reverberations and saw the first flashes of lightning. The first drops came driving down, and they had turned to go into the house when Warriner saw a hillside a quarter of a mile away light up with a glare that was not from the storm. The next instant a red tongue of flame waved up the side of a hay barn which stood there.

Warriner ran to the stable to tell Creagan and found the foreman already starting for the fire with every man about the place. Warriner went back to the drawing-room and joined Marianne at one of the French windows. The broad expanse of clipped lawn and shrubbery, the winding gravel driveway, were swept by gusts—covered by sudden sheets of blue light. The windows rattled to the crashing thunder.

The storm was at its height when a curve in the drive that had been bare but a moment before was blotted out by swift forms. Horsemen riding hard and low. Thorne and Snarg with a halfscore of men at their backs. Marianne, sensing danger, cried out.

"Tricked, by the gods!" gasped Warriner. "I didn't think lightning struck that barn! They set fire to it and drew off the men or they would never dare this!"

He had, perhaps, as much as one full minute before they would come beating at the door of the manor. The white face of the girl was turned to him, as to a strong tower. Could he hold out until Creagan and the men came back? He doubted it, against such odds. He could not hide her; they would search the house from top to bottom. He could not escape with her, for there was no time to saddle horses. He could think of but one course of action and he decided upon it between two breaths.

"Marianne!" he cried, seizing her hands. "Listen carefully to me! Go to my room! There is money in the teakwood cabinet—take it. Then down the servants' stairway to the stable. A boy's there. Tell him to put the fast black mare to the chaise, drive you across the back meadow to the main road, and get to Port Franklin in the best time the mare can make. There you'll be safe. To-morrow you sail. Go, Marianne, and remember, if you think of me, that I love you!"

"But you?" she whispered, clinging to his arm. "Why don't you come?"

John Peter Warriner laughed. His blue eyes filled with points of cold light, like little points of naked steel.

"I must engage the attention of these gentlemen for a matter of ten or fifteen minutes, *mademoiselle!* Now, go quickly!"

"But—you are alone!"

"Go! In the name of Heaven, go!" He pushed her toward the door.

"If I must, *monsieur—adieu!*"

Her slippered feet pattered upon the stairs. Warriner could hear the shouts outside as the men flung themselves from their saddles. He leaped into the library, snatched up his saber, flung the scabbard into a corner, and ran back to the stairway. He began to back slowly upward, shifting both pistols to a left-hand pocket. Halfway up the stairs were broken by a landing. A very good place to defend. Above he heard cries and hurrying feet. The women servants were taking refuge in the third story.

The massive black walnut front door swung open and thundered back against the wall with the silver knocker banging. The doorway filled with a rush of men. Alexander Thorne led, as befitted him. A tall, dark man; elegant in spite of his sodden clothing. Behind him pressed Snarg and Captain Nippy Smith, a pock-marked bandit. It was the crew of the boat, then, with which they made the raid; hard fighters all.

"Warriner!" called Thorne from the foot of the stairs. "I've come for the girl!"

John Peter Warriner, leaning upon the basket hilt of his saber, smiled down at him. Thorne carried a pistol in each hand. So did Snarg. Most of the others carried cudgels in sight, and knives, no doubt, where they could be reached. Warriner preferred to see the pistols, for a pistol could only bite once. There would be no time for reloading in this fight once started.

"Thorne," he said, "come and take the girl if you can!"

He saw a half dozen barrels gleam in the weird gray-blue light and dropped to the floor of the landing, low but with his legs under him. He drew and fired at Thorne as he went down. The volley crashed, filling the house with a cataract of sound. The wainscoting above his head cracked and splintered under the impact of the lead.

"Raw troops fire high!" he thought jauntily as he sprang to his feet. His heart sang with the joy of battle and he hurled the empty pistol into a face that came out of the billowing black powder smoke. The second pistol leaped to his hand.

They wavered in the drifting smoke, with their stomachs full for the moment. Thorne was intact, but one of the men lay stretched, groaning, upon the floor. Captain Nippy was deliberately reloading. Warriner shot him as he rammed home the bullet, and he rolled over the other wounded man.

"Come on, you damned laggards!" cried Thorne. "That's his last shot!"

So they came on again, a packed mass of bodies. Warriner flung his second pistol and struck Thorne between the eyes, smashing him back into the arms of his men. Then he knelt with a long thrust and drove his point a good two inches into the shoulder of Toby Snarg. Again the wave receded, but only for a moment. And now Warriner knew that they would warm to the fighting and give him trouble, hell-hot.

"Crush him down!" shouted Thorne. "What are your clubs for?"

He snatched a cudgel from one of the men. Snarg, with his horrible grin spread until every yellow tooth in his head was revealed, drew a knife.

Cut and thrust! Parry! Thrust! The heavy saber played like a living thing in the hand of John Peter Warriner. The cudgels rattled upon his blade. The long knife of Snarg flashed in and out, trying to get under his guard. He was driven backward up the last section of the stairs.

Let him be forced away from the head of the stairway and the end would be in sight. After that he could only stand with his back against the wall and fight to the death. There would be no mercy now among those blood-maddened men.

Fortunately no more than two could reach him effectively at once. He held long, but at last he was on the top stair. Then, under a terrific blow from a club, his saber broke and he was left with a foot-long stump. It was the end, he thought bitterly, come just when there was a slight chance of victory. For Thorne was down on the landing, leaning deathly pale against the wall, with both hands pressed to his side. Two others sprawled upon the stairs. The attack had begun to slacken.

Now Snarg pressed him. His left arm hung useless, but he handled the knife with undiminished vigor. He called to the men to come on and finish it. Warriner gripped the stump of his saber to meet the last attack—and suddenly jerked backward at a frantic pull upon his arm. He looked down into the wide black eyes of Marianne Fortier.

"The true steel, *monsieur!*" she panted, thrusting the crusader's dagger into his hand. "God and the Virgin be with you!"

At sight of her there was a shout from the stairs. Warriner turned barely in time to meet the blade of Snarg. Knife and dagger locked and hung for an instant. Snarg and Warriner blocked the stairway. The others drew back, tacitly.

"Hail, Mary, full of grace—"

The words struck upon Warriner's ears and he knew that Marianne was there, behind him. The knowledge gave him the strength of ten. Snarg disengaged and thrust. Warriner took a long flesh wound upon his arm. His coat sleeve flapped. Certainly Snarg was a devil with the knife.

"—the Lord is with thee—"

Thrust and parry! Thrust! The points each found flesh. Snarg staggered. But his blade had slid along Warriner's ribs. Lights danced before his eyes.

"—Pray for us sinners, now—"

True steel, she had said. Warriner feinted and lunged with all the desperation of failing strength. A groan. Snarg lost his footing. He heaved mightily backward, his grinning face going down like a waning moon of the infernal regions.

At the same moment the hall below filled with a roar of voices. Creagan and his men at last! Those on the stairs who could turned and plunged down, charging for liberty. The fight filled the house with a mighty clamor.

John Peter Warriner staggered to a chair and dropped into it, gasping. Marianne, with wet and shining eyes, pulled at the flapping sleeve.

"Your wounds!" she cried. "I must dress them at once!"

"You didn't go!" he panted.

"Go while there was danger?" she exclaimed. "Do you think it is a woman of that nature whom you have asked to be your wife? Ah, I have much to teach you, my Jean Pierre!"

Many Waters

By ELMER BROWN MASON

DELLA FORSYTHE replaced her coffee cup on the tray, poked it exactly in the center of the saucer, then lifted her eyes to the young man beside her.

"Why don't we get married now, Billy?" she said.

"Get married now?" Billy Worthington repeated in astonishment. "Get married—why, Della, you know I intend to have a home for you before we're married!"

The girl's color heightened.

"You mean you want to have *this* sort of home for me," she corrected; "the home father's made for his family?"

"Of course that's what I mean."

She was silent for a few moments, then spoke in a voice that was impersonal.

"Father is twice your age. When he and mother were married his salary was less than half the amount you're getting now. They lived in a tiny apartment away uptown. Mother did her own housework—"

"But, Della, just think how different conditions were then." His tone was soothing; in fact, it was the tone which had gained him two raises in salary during the year. He now added a persuasive note. "Don't you know, dear, that I want to give you everything in the world—just everything? But I can't at present give you the home you're entitled to, the home—"

"Like this," she finished the sentence for him, indicating their surroundings with a comprehensive gesture.

"Well—yes," he admitted, "but there are other reasons as well. I've a hard year before me—a crucial year. I've got to give all my time and thought to my work."

"I shouldn't mind," Della broke in.

"But I should mind." He spoke with decision. "You haven't any idea what kind of a year I have ahead of me, Della. If we married now I should have to neglect you. And I can't do that. I want to have some time to devote to you when we're married."

"Don't you suppose, Billy, that I could stand a little 'neglect' as you call it, when I knew the reason for it?"

"You think you could," he said patiently, "but you'd grow tired of it, Della. Just think! I won't have any time for dances or the theater; it's just got to be straight work for nearly all my waking hours. And that would grow monotonous to you."

She thought this over for a moment, then said gravely:

"Would I be a burden to you, Billy, while you were working so hard?"

"Never a burden," he answered promptly, "only—I might not be able to give the best in me to what I've got to accomplish in the next twelve months—and I *must* do that."

"But I don't believe I'd hinder you! I believe I could help you—if you'd let me."

"But I don't want to be helped," he objected gently. "Your part in our life is to be happy."

"I see," Della said slowly; "I see." She swung suddenly about to face him squarely. "This plan of yours, for our life, Billy, it—it makes me a kind of Sultan's favorite, doesn't it?"

"That's absurd!" Worthington laughed. There was no amusement in the laugh. It carried a hint of annoyance.

Della began to plait and replait the fringed ends of her sash.

"When father and mother were married," she said, her eyes intent on the fringe, "they had no maids. Mother did the marketing and cooking, washed the dishes and did the cleaning. She says she has never since experienced the pride she felt when her first waffles were successful. Father ate four. She told me she saved enough money out of the household allowance to buy her a new frock."

"Somehow, I can't visualize your mother making waffles," the man laughed. "She has always seemed such a 'point-lace-and-diamonds' kind of person."

"She is—now," Della agreed readily. "The thing I'm trying to show you, though, is that she *helped* father."

"Well, I don't care for waffles," he said lightly, then, conscious of his mistake, hastened his words. "Things were altogether different in those days—different and simpler. It's wonderfully brave and sweet of you to want to help me, but I really don't want to be helped, in that way. I want to do it myself, win out for you without aid of any kind."

"Don't you think I might appreciate our home more if I were allowed to help, even in a very minor way, to acquire it?"

"No, I don't. It's a pretty theory, of course, but in real life—at least, in real life to-day, it isn't practical. Men must work, you know—"

"And women must wait, I suppose," she misquoted the rest of the line. "I wonder, Billy, if the first cavewoman found the first caveman queer and unreasonable? I suppose it's chivalry that makes men want to bind women hand and foot—lightly, of course, so we won't be conscious of it."

"I don't think chivalry is such a bad thing."

"Chivalry!" she retorted. "It's a kind of mental tear-gas that men use to befuddle our minds. Don't you suppose that women have *always* wanted to share burdens with the men they love?"

"I don't know and I doubt if there's any way of finding out," he replied, annoyed in spite of himself. "You're tired, Della. Won't you promise me to go up to Connecticut to your people to-morrow? You've stayed too long in this heat. And you know I'm leaving for Maine in the morning."

The girl shook her head.

"No, I have some things to do that will keep me in town for another week. So you scorn my proposals, do you?"

"With indignation. I will not be coerced into matrimony." He laughed to hide his growing impatience, then bent down to her averted face. "Sweet dreams, Della mine. Won't you try to be patient and understand how I feel about this, dear? You can help me, infinitely, that way."

"I suppose so." The girl sighed, stood up. "Well, good-by, dear. I'm glad you're getting away to-morrow. Have a good rest. You might think over what I've been saying, and—"

What extraordinary ideas girls had now and then, Billy Worthington told himself as he turned into the avenue and caught

a bus. They didn't seem able to weigh things, consider. Illogical, that was it. Let Della do housework, toil for him? Not much! Mechanically he squared his shoulders, adjusting them to his burden.

II.

For two days he was content to sit on the porch of a fisherman's cottage and let the Maine sunlight seep into his veins. He was more tired than he had realized. It was hard to forget the law offices of Whitney, Blaine & Carson; hard to forget the sheafs of legal papers, the work ahead—the work ahead! That difficult year which he must win through! But at the end of it he would be in a position to marry Della Forsythe.

However, being a perfectly normal and well-balanced young man, Worthington found by the third morning he could, temporarily, put away disturbing thoughts.

"Land o' me, you rusticators do sleep!" Mrs. Epps greeted him when he came downstairs. "They ain't hardly nothin' lef' fer breakfast 'cept some coffee an' eggs an' corned hake. I'll make ye some hot toast right away, though."

"I don't see what else I could have, unless you fry the cat," Worthington laughed. "It certainly is wonderful how one can sleep in this sea air!"

Mrs. Epps smiled pityingly, her glance plainly conveying sympathy for one who, through force of circumstances, did not live on the Maine coast.

Breakfast over, Worthington stepped out on the porch and lit his pipe. Uncle John Epps sat rocking leisurely in the sunlight, his shirt well open at the throat to let as much heat as possible penetrate his ancient body. Between puffs the younger man let his eyes roam over the calm expanse of blue-green water before him. Casco Bay sparkled in the morning light, dotted with islands clothed in spruce and balsam—emerald-green jewels set in a matrix of turquoise sea.

One island repeatedly drew his eyes. It was called Far Island, Mrs. Epps had told him, and differed from the others only in the ring of foam that seemed always to encircle it. There was no reason why he should be interested in it. The other islands had their traditions: Big Wood had once harbored a counterfeiting gang; gulls nested on Little Wood, and an old seal haunted its seaward side; Wallace Island was still held, under the original grant from King George, by direct descendants of Sir William Wallace. Far Island alone seemed to have no story. It suddenly occurred to him that the fisher folk had been unusually reticent about it.

Worthington stirred impatiently. How silly to keep thinking about it! He looked out across the bay, his eyes resting on a round of rocks, fringed with foam and crowned with the dull green of stunted spruce trees. Confound it! There *was* something unusual about the island—unusual and—well, mysterious.

"What is there queer about Far Island?" he asked, turning suddenly to the older man.

Uncle John gave the question some thought before replying.

"Reckon thar ain't nothin' queer 'bout it," he said at length, then lapsed into silence.

Worthington tried again. "Any one live there?"

"Not fer some time." Uncle John paused, then went on as if prompted by memory: "Ol' woman lived thar wunst. Lone woman. Died 'bout twenty year back."

"Lived alone!" Worthington repeated in surprise. "What on earth was a woman doing there alone?"

Uncle John shook his grizzled head dubiously.

"I don't rightly know. She was queer. Right peart at fishin' an' lobsterin', I've heared tell." He rose to his feet and went creakingly toward the door. "She was queer," he repeated, and stepped into the house.

"Mr. Worthington!" came a voice from the water. "D'ye want to go out to-day whilst I haul my lobster traps?"

"Sure do," Worthington answered, and ran down the steps of the little dock.

The able little gasoline craft *put-putted* from one lobster buoy to another, and

Worthington felt his weariness drop from him as he gave himself up to the gentle rocking of the boat and the infinite peace of the sea. The catch was good, and the city man regarded with personal pride the mass of lobsters that crawled about on wet seaweed in the bow. The boat pointed out from shore, and Worthington saw the foam-encircled rocks of Far Island straight ahead.

"Just the place I want to ask about." He nodded toward the island.

"Good water round it fer lobsters," Jesse Blaisdell volunteered. "Uncle John Epps ketched one thar wunst that weighed thirty-two pound. Got hisself tangled in the riggin' of the trap."

"Uncle John told me an old woman used to live there," Worthington commented, ignoring the fisherman's digression.

"Ye-es," Blaisdell admitted. "Uster hear tell of her when I was a boy. Folks allus uster see the light she kep' burnin' all night."

"What became of her?"

"I don't rightly know."

"But doesn't any one know?" Worthington persisted. "Hasn't any one been to the island since she left—if she did go?"

"I don't guess she ever went away," the fisherman said thoughtfully. "Folks thinks she must of got drowned. Leastwise, thar stopped bein' a light, an' when somebody stopped by wa'n't nobody thar. But all her things was thar, an' ef she hadn't of been drowned she'd likely hev took 'em with her."

"No one been on the island since?"

"No," Blaisdell replied, then laughed suddenly, "'ceptin' Alex Williams. He don't rightly belong in these parts, Alex Williams don't, only been here 'bout twenty year or thereabouts. Well, when he was buildin' his house he figgered he'd git some winder frames from the cabin on Far Island, seein's it didn't seem to belong to nobody. It wa'n't nobody's business, but a lot o' folks kinder watched to see him land." Blaisdell paused, rounded to a lobster buoy and hauled up the trap. He threw back several small crustaceans and put two "counters"—lobsters large enough to be legally taken—beneath the seaweed in the bow.

"What did he see?" Worthington asked when they were again under way.

"He didn't *see* nothin'," Blaisdell replied, with obvious enjoyment. "He says 'twas what he *heared*. 'I hadn't more'n stepped inter that house,' he says, 'when thar come the awfulest sobbin' I ever heared. Ef I hev to git winder frames from thar,' he says, 'my house ain't goin' to hev no winder frames.' Ain't nobody been thar since, that I know of," the young fisherman concluded.

"Huh! That's queer," Worthington commented. "But I should think some one else might have had the curiosity to go there."

"Well, ye kain't land thar 'ceptin' at mid-tide," Blaisdell explained, "an' when fishin's good folks is right busy, an' thar's plenty to do when it ain't."

The boat rounded to another buoy and lost way. The fisherman caught the rope just below the buoy with a hooked stick and began to pull up the lobster trap at the end of it. Worthington stared at Far Island, now only a hundred yards distant. The shores were very steep and of frowning rock, save in one spot where a narrow spit of sand came down to the sea. Spruce and hardwoods covered the island and grew thickly almost to the water's edge. Above the narrow spit of sand a tiny house of weather-beaten gray was poised against the dull green and brown of the trees. Although the day was calm, white water swirled and tore about the rocks and outlying ledges.

Blaisdell canted the lobster trap over the side of the boat, rebaited it, and let it slide down through the green depths. His eyes followed those of the city man to the tiny gray house.

"Kinder looks like it might be ha'nted," he said, instinctively lowering his voice.

Worthington brought his eyes back from the wooded shore. After all, there was nothing unusual about the island. And yet—

"I believe I'll explore Far Island," he said impulsively. "Could you land me there at mid-tide? That will be about six this evening, won't it? And take me off at mid-tide to-morrow morning? There'll be five dollars in it for you."

"I'll be glad to take ye," Blaisdell answered, "ef ye feel like comin'. But I don't want no money fer it," he concluded with dignity.

III.

It was just six o'clock when Worthington waved his hand in farewell to Blaisdell, backing his boat out from the spit of white sand. An almost forgotten thrill of small-boy excitement came as he realized he would be here alone, on this forgotten island, all night.

As the boat chug-chugged its way homeward Worthington picked up his army blanket, jug of water, and lantern, and went up the sand pit toward the weather-beaten cabin. Then he paused and laid down his burdens, remembering that he had only a little daylight in which to explore the island.

"I'll leave the house for last," he decided. "Forward, *Robinson Crusoe!*" He looked quickly around, as though half expecting to hear an answering voice.

There was, however, no sound, and he turned toward the thickly growing spruces. Walking was not difficult, as there was but comparatively little underbrush, and he went straight across the island beneath the trees.

Worthington felt a distinct feeling of relief as he stepped out of their somber shadows and gained the shore. The sun was beginning to throw long bars of gold down the western sky, as though lighting the path before it. Everything was still, save for the fretting water that boiled among the ledges and the deep murmur of the sea, hushed now to a monotone as if evening had placed a soothing hand on its unrest.

Turning along the shore, Worthington came upon the remnants of a dozen lobster pots, once neatly piled, but long since fallen into decay. He circled the island, keeping to the outskirts of the trees. On the eastern side he found that the water boiled over sunken ledges which extended into the sea for several hundred yards. A good place for seals, he thought.

The sun was sinking now, flooding the western sky with brilliance. The color was reflected in the waters of the bay, changing them from blue green to rose and opal and crimson, shot through with bars of gold.

As he stood watching the changing panorama of sea and sky a feeling of disappointment came over Worthington. There was nothing remarkable about the island, he decided. The feeling of mystery had gone, leaving nothing but vague dissatisfaction. It was a thoroughly uninteresting place; silent, too. There was no evensong of birds; not even the yammer of an indignant squirrel broke the stillness. The only sounds to be heard were the unceasing murmur of the sea and the occasional shrill scream of a gull that wheeled in great circles overhead.

"I was a fool to come here," Worthington said aloud. "Well, I hope the house may prove more thrilling than the island."

Turning impatiently, he scaled the path up the rocks which led to the dwelling. The door stood open, revealing two small rooms. The larger of them seemed to have been a combined living and bed room. There were two kitchen chairs, a table, a couch bed that had sunk low on its rotting legs, and a cupboard sagging desolately on one hinge. Through the kitchen doorway could be seen a small cooking stove, red with rust. In the living room a single window looked out toward the sea.

Worthington stepped within, then stopped abruptly, frozen into immobility. As though it were in the very room, a long wail rose, hung in the air for a ghastly moment, and ended in a choking sob. The man stood motionless. Again came the wail, and suddenly he recognized it as the sough of water in a rocky cavern beneath, a cavern that was evidently emptying and filling with the tide level of the moment. In relief he let out the breath that he had been unconsciously holding.

"Good Lord! I don't blame that Williams person for running away," Worthington told himself and stepped farther into the room.

Depositing his blanket on one chair, he sat down on another and began to light the lantern. The trees about the house cut off the westering light, and faint shadows lay in the corners of the room. When the flame

had burned up to a steady light he turned to examine his surroundings carefully.

The fireplace was bare of ashes. The floor was surprisingly free of dust. Both rooms, in fact, were as clean as though daily swept and dusted. And this house had been untenanted for twenty years! Through the solitary window he could see the white foam that encircled the island and the turquoise of the sea beyond. With surprise he realized that the glass was clear, free alike of dust and incrusted spray.

It had grown quite dark now, save for the soft light that hangs always above the sea. The air was chilly and rather damp. Worthington picked up the lantern and placed it on the table, hesitated for a moment, then went out and down the path to the spit of land. Gathering an armful of driftwood, he returned and placed it on the clean hearth, then lit a match and held it to the pile. The dry, salt-impregnated wood caught with a cheerful crackle and the golden flames licked upward, sending blue, dancing shadows against the walls.

"More cheerful now," Worthington told himself. "Nothing quite so friendly as a wood fire."

Opening a package, he spread his supper on the small table. He had nothing from which to drink, save the awkward water jug, so he opened the rickety cupboard and peered within. A half dozen blue plates were piled on one shelf. Beside them stood two pink water glasses and a fat pitcher with staring pink roses on its sides. Somehow, the sight of the poor little collection sent a lump into Worthington's throat. He took down, with a touch that was almost reverent, one of the pink glasses and placed it on the table beside him.

"I'll wash you and put you back when I'm through," he promised and turned to the abundant meal Mrs. Epps had prepared.

As he ate, his thoughts were busy, vainly trying to visualize the owner of the little gray house who had left it so mysteriously to disappear into the greater mystery of the sea. Who was she? Why had she chosen to live here alone? Was she married? Or a spinster, perhaps, to whom this small, neat nest had been a refuge? A refuge from what? His imagination was unequal to the task of answering these questions, and he dismissed them. How amused Della would be when he told her of his little adventure!

No, not amused. If Della were here she would be very tender toward this lonely little house; she would understand, perhaps, what had been in that other woman's mind. He tried to picture Della opposite him, gave that up finally, and rose to gather up the broken bits of food and make them into a neat package. After cleansing the glass he replaced it in the cupboard, lit his pipe, and stepped across to the window.

It was dark outside, a darkness that seemed to draw near, to be reaching velvety hands toward the lantern flame. He turned back to the cheerfulness of the fire, and, as he did so, saw an odd mark on the window sill. Bending down to examine it closer, he found that it was a circle worn into the wood.

"The lamp, by Jove! Of course it would wear a place for itself if it were put here every night, year after year." Acting on a sudden, uncontrollable impulse, Worthington picked up the lantern and placed it over the worn, round spot.

The fire had flickered down to red coals. The wind was rising and murmuring in the spruce branches, a gentle obligato to the music of the sea. Worthington lifted his arms above his head and yawned. How sleepy this sea air did make one! He unfolded his blanket, crossed the room, and tried the strength of the couch with a tentative hand. It crumbled beneath his touch. Somewhat startled by its sudden collapse, he moved back to the fireplace and spread his blanket before it. Refilling his pipe, he lay down and sleepily watched the glow fading in the fireplace, dying down to white ashes. Presently he knocked out the pipe and laid it beside him.

It was deliciously quiet. The wail of the sea in the rocky cavern had ceased as the tide went out. What a good rest he was having! He would go back to work fit and ready. Della! His heart thrilled to her name. A year's hard work and then . . . Della . . .

The stars were shining faintly now. Better get up and put out that lantern. . . . There was the far-off cry of a gull . . . the

sound of lapping water . . . Worthington slept.

IV.

THE lantern had burned low, and the room was full of soft shadows when Worthington suddenly woke. He moved his cramped limbs and sat up yawning. There had been the impression of a voice, some one calling him from far off. He felt that some one was watching him. With an effort he raised his eyes, and as he lifted them he became aware of seaboots protruding beneath a coarse, gray skirt, of an infinitely wrinkled face, a quiet figure seated in a chair on the other side of the fireplace. There was nothing terrifying in the homely figure of the little old woman —the terror lay in the fact that she was there.

Common sense fought with a chill fear as Worthington lowered his eyes. This was an illusion, of course, probably the waking fragment of a dream. When he looked again it would be gone. He lifted them. The seaboots peeped from beneath the worn, coarse skirt. The wrinkled face, the small, still figure, were still there. He saw now she was smiling at him, a smile of patience, quiet strength, even tenderness.

"I didn't aim to wake ye, but I seed the light," said a low voice.

Worthington opened his lips to answer, but could find nothing to say.

The little old woman smiled again. "How was it you come to put the light in the winder?"

"Why—why—I don't know. It seemed as if—as if it belonged there." His mind was racing madly, trying to find an answer to this mystery, a reasonable answer.

"Yes, a light should be thar," she agreed.

Silence fell. A sudden thought came to the man. This was a joke, perpetrated by some one who would consider it amusing.

"Jesse Blaisdell brought you here, didn't he?" he said accusingly.

"No," she answered. Her tone did not rise to meet his. "No, wa'n't nobody put me here. I'm allus here. I'm allus waitin' fer him," she explained, smiling patiently.

"Oh, that's it!" There was relief in Worthington's voice. The old woman must be some poor half-wit who had, in some way, reached the island. He pitied the poor creature. Still—he wished she would make some movement, would not sit so still. "Do you expect him to come soon?"

"P'raps not soon. Some time, but I dunno how soon."

"I don't quite understand," Worthington said politely. He was no longer uncomfortable now that he had found a logical theory to account for his strange visitor's presence.

"Men folks don't understand, es a rule," the quiet voice answered. "He does—now."

"Would you mind explaining to me?" Best to humor her, he decided.

"No, I guess not. You put the light in the winder, so I guess I kin tell ye. Ye see, we was 'lone here, 'way off from others, but I didn't mind, nor he didn't, either. He could allus make a landin', no matter how bad the chop got. Had his moorin's jest off the sand down thar, an' 'twas easy fer him to go off to her in the dory. We done well the fust year. The Loretty was a good boat—he called her fer me, Loretty. The nex' summer he got his hand scratched by a dinky-hake's teeth, so it all swelled up. I ast fer him to let me go 'long fishin' with him then an' he took me—smooth days. Days when 'twas rough, though, he'd make me stay home, said 'twa'n't no work fer a woman. I sez: 'Any work that 'll help you is work fer me,' but he sez: 'A man ain't no man that 'll let a woman do his work fer him.' Turrible set he was, allus. Winter come an' he was still poor-ly. I kep' wantin' him to let me go an' help him, but he wouldn't listen to me—thar was chop most of the time. I kep' on an' kep' on astin' him. He allus said 'twa'n't no work fer wimmen—" The even voice died out, became still.

Worthington tore his eyes from the wrinkled face and looked out of the window. The stars were paling. The lantern flame had burned very low. Suddenly the wailing cry echoed from the cavern beneath, hung in the air for a moment, then ended in the choking sob. The tide had risen once more.

"Men folks don't rightly understand," the voice took up the tale again. "They

don't never seem to know what wimmen kin do to help, ner how proud it makes them *to* help. I was a strong girl—I'm some older now—but he wouldn't hear to lettin' me help. One day I sez: 'You just got to let me go to-day. The sky looks bad. I feels if I just *got* to go to-day.' It made him mad, me pesterin' him so much, an' he sez: 'I guess I kin manage my own boat. I guess I don't need no woman to help me make a livin'.' He went out then an' I see him rowin' toward the Loretty. Come a sudden wind 'bout four o'clock, an' it blowed somethin' dreadful. I lit the lamp an' put it in the winder so's he could guide by it, an' I set all night waitin' fer the Loretty to come home." The voice paused, then went on: "She didn't never come."

Worthington tried to speak, but something caught at his throat, seemed to choke off the words.

"I kep' the light burnin' year on year, winter an' summer, till somethin' come over me one day, an' I couldn't light it no more. I was glad when I see your light. Mebbe he'll see it, too. Mebbe he's come to understand an' is sailin' the Loretty home—"

Worthington rose to his feet, his heart aching with pity. The stars had faded out and the white light of early morning was touching the water. Was it the wind in the trees or the long chant of the sea that brought a forgotten Bible verse to mind: "Many waters cannot drown love—"

He took a step toward the figure by the fireplace, then stopped abruptly, amazed at the expression that had suddenly overspread the withered face—an expression of such intense listening, such glowing hope, that it seemed to wrap the small form in radiance.

"Mr. Worthington" came a hail from the sea. "Are ye all right?"

"Of course I'm all right," he called, then looked back toward his companion. The first sunbeams were spreading a pool of gold across the floor. The lantern had flickered out. Worthington looked, then looked again. The chair by the fireplace was empty; the little old woman had gone!

Jesse Blaisdell stepped from his dory as Worthington came down the strip of sand.

"I've got to get back to New York right away," Worthington said abruptly. "If you'll take me to Portland—"

He stopped suddenly, his eyes following those of the young fisherman. Moving gently up and back over the sands with the wash of the waves was an old, old boat, its masts broken, its sides covered with trailing seaweed. Even before he had brushed aside the weeds from the stern and looked at the dim letters of the name Worthington knew that the Loretta had come home.

PASTORAL

CROWING cock and rising sun—dawn, the bane of lovers;
Daphne, stepping, lily-pale, from her tumbled covers;
Strephon—(could the morn not wait?)
Shutting soft the small, green gate,
With a half-smile on the lips where her kiss still hovers.

Whippoorwill and pearly moon—night, to lovers kindly,
Daphne, at the latticed pane, watching, sleep-drugged, blindly;
Strephon—(having drained his cup!)
Lying in the wood—face up,
What of sudden sword-thrust did the gossip wind, see?

Crowing cock and rising sun—Girl, as white as roses,
Grants no liberties to Dawn; dreaming, she reposes;
Strephon (who lies in the glen)
Sleeps beside her once again,
Night, for dead men, has no door which the morning closes.

Faith Baldwin.

The Kentucky Wonder

By BAYARD SHARPE

JOHNNY WALDEN, matchmaker of the Eastern Athletic Club, sat in the big swivel chair before his much-littered desk and gazed into the heavy, smoke-laden atmosphere of the office. He was peeved, and a frown displaced the features of his naturally cadaverous face. Suddenly the frown deepened, reached top center, and the thin lips exploded in an adamant, emphatic malediction, which ended in the echo from the lips of the club's secretary, Tod Cooper.

"Blaah!"

The reason of Walden's peeve was one Kid Troubles, an embryonic heavyweight, who for the past six months, had been knocking all comers into dreamland by that way which marks the end of all pie-trained, derby-domed Pork an' Beaners. This was disastrous. Fighters who could show against Kid Troubles were scarcer than honest politicians; and because his end of the show usually ended in a marathon, the fight fans, on fight night, were putting on their slippers, filling the ole Jimmy-pipes, and accepting invitations to spend the evenings—with their sweet "wimmin."

The club had staged a fight the night before—pardon us, we meant foot race; for it took Kid Troubles three miles to overtake the pacemaker, and when he did he decorated that puffing individual with everything but murder. Moreover, the affair was assault and battery on the club's bank roll.

To determine the exact damage, Walden's eyes slid to the open ledger which lay on the desk. The fingers showed a positive profit in war tax only; with the result that Walden's lean jaw bumped into his breast bone, and his lips framed another terse but elaborate adjective.

"Box office receipts will just about cover the light bill!" he grumbled. "Public can't be fooled no more. Gotta get a bird tuh clean up on Troubles—or quit stagin' him!" He swung his chair toward the secretary, ordering: "Tod, get a line on Jim Carrigan; he's handlin' K. O. Burns. When yuh find him, wire expenses, an' tell him tuh bring

himself an' his ham tuh this man's town, right now!"

Tod reached for the letter file, found the address, and had just finished the telegram when the door opened. Both he and Walden turned their eyes to examine the visitor, and the next moment Walden's thin-soled, cream-topped shoes hit the floor.

"Carrigan!" he roared, stumbling forward and grasping the visitor's hand. "Hooray f'r Carrigan!"

Carrigan shook his big gray-rimmed head. "Can th' hoorays, Walden," he growled, "an' bring on th' flowers—what y'r lampin' is th' sad r'mains!"

Walden's face clouded. "What's th' matter; things ain't breakin' right?"

"Yuh said it all," Carrigan groaned, dropping into a chair. "Me an' K. O. Burns is done!"

"D-d-d-done!" Walden gasped, swallowing the balance of his smile. "W-w-why, I thought you two was thicker'n hell?"

"We was," Carrigan admitted, "but no more—an' here's why." He slouched deeper into the chair, lit one of Walden's cigars, and began his story.

"Last month I packs myself an' K. O. down to New Orle'ns. Th' pickin' looks good, an' in a couple o' days we're signed f'r ten frames with a bird named Kentucky Kid. A double up an' down o' this said Kid's gool-knockin' av'rage tells us he's kayoin' round two fifty—nothin' but hicks, though; an' while we figures him easy, we don't take no chances. K. O. goes in trainin' like he's signed tuh do a one-step with Dempsey, f'r a half int'rest in th' Nati'nal Bank. He takes tuh th' climate like a cockroach; eats up th' road work like a Packard, an' outa his sparrin' partners makes pie f'r th' beauty doctors!

"In a week's time K. O. is right in the pink; so I figures th' best way tuh collect is tuh unbutton th' bank roll an' take ever'thing in sight. This ain't hard tuh do, an' I place ten thousan' loud-speakin' iron men that says Kentucky Kid's a big bean. Blaah! Then what does this K. O. baby o' mine do but fall f'r one o' them long, narrer-gaged, stately Southern damosels! Yes, sir, shot th' chutes like a crooked district attorney!

"Yuh never saw such a change in a bird. He's sure one goofy baby, but I figures him tuh come clean—an' don't worry none. One mornin' I'm out lookin' th' country over tuh see where I'm gonna invest all th' easy jack, an' I run into him doin' his road work like he's presticin' pall-bearin'. I kinda kid him 'bout it, but that afternoon when I seen him workin' out with th' gloves—believe me, mister, I get interested. This K. O. baby o' mine has been stung so hard with Cupid's dart—he all but kisses his sparrin' partners!

"He slows up on his trainin' f'r a week, tryin' tuh kid me he don't wanna go stale. But his chatter don't listen good, an' I try tuh change his tune. What I say tuh him mixes like a wop at a Mick party. He's a love-sick idiot; an' by th' night that th' fisticuffs comes off, I'm shakin' like a hop head, an' wishin' I'd sunk my jack f'r a half-int'rest with Baron Long at Tia Juana.

"That's just the way I feel the night o' th' fight, but I can't help it, an' even when I sees th' turnout—I'm wishin' it was all over. This Kentucky Kid draws th' crowd like m'lasses leads on th' flies. Th' house is packed tighter'n a new deck o' cards; an' from what I gather outa th' chatter, th' gang expects tuh see K. O. Burns embalmed!

"Me an' K. O. has it doped that th' massacre begins with th' nine o'clock curfew, so we hits th' abatoir 'bout nine five. Th' gang razzes my boy; but K. O. comes back with a he-movie smile an' kinda perks me up by tellin' me he's so right he could tie a knot in a wildcat's tail!

"'Bout nine fifteen th' Bluegrass Kid we're mixin' with comes down th' aisle; an', believe me, mister, if that bird's packin' any overweight, he sure lost it shaken hands on th' way tuh th' ring. An' noise—say, f'm th' roar th' crowd makes, I ain't sure but I'm hearin' th' echo of th' last republican convention. I expects this; an' I hand K. O. th' big wink, meanin'—if them howlin' wolves can cry like they yells—there's gonna be a cloudburst soon!

"Th' reg'ment f'm Ole Kentuck follows their pride through th' ropes, an' me an' K. O. kinda anxious tuh lamp th' pop'lar gladiator, stretch our necks. Bein' kinda short, I don't see much; so I climb up on a

chair, an' th' next thing I know somethin' that feels like th' roof hits me on th' toes o' my high-polished No. 10's. I looks down tuh see what's happened, an' there's K. O. slouchin' in th' chair like he's busted th' hinges in his knees. I tumble tuh th' floor, an' when I lamps his face, his chin's shimmyin' like a chorus lady's shoulders. I asks him th' what's what, an' he tell me this bird looks tougher'n he thought!

"Mister, that said remark has made me feel weaker'n Volstead liquor, an' while I'm bleary eyed, Kentucky Kid comes over an' shakes hands with K. O. like he's a long-lost brother. Then th' ref'ree calls 'em tuh th' spot, tells 'em th' how's how, an' th' next thing I know th' bell blows!

"K. O. waltzes out an' begins kinda slow-like tuh see what this bird's got, but he learns nothin'; so he takes th' lead an' boxes. Kentucky Kid joins in, an' it begins tuh look like we have nothin' tuh worry over. They box easy, but just before th' ding-dong, Kentucky Kid unwinds th' ole left mowin' m'chine. K. O. sees it comin' an' steps inside, just as Kentuck starts his right elevator; an', say, mister, that said lifter started by scrapin' th' rosin off th' canvas, an' ended up in th' arc lights. If it had been a hit K. O. would have finished right now. But it ain't; an' tuh show that it could be done, K. O. unbuttons two o' th' same kind f'r easy hits!

"Th' second frame's ditto. Kentuck uses th' ole left haymaker an' th' Kid Farmer uppercut; but he misses so often that half th' time he's posin' like th' Statue o' Liberty, an' every time he misses K. O. seesaws him with th' ole one-two. When th' second bell comes Kentuck's inhalin' some o' his own claret!

"All along K. O. has been actin' loggy; he's missin' a lot o' easy ones, an' when he does land, his punches seem tuh lack th' ole snap. Yuh know when K. O. is battlin' he don't wear no smiles. Lets me do th' smilin', while he does th' frownin' an' fightin', an' when he come in f'r th' second rest, it only takes one look tuh see he's frownin' like a cornered safe cracker. So figurin' he's found this bird's all, an' is jus' stallin' tuh give th' gang a run, I quit worryin'!

"With th' third bell, K. O. rares outa his corner like he's gonna bale some Bluegrass, but Kentuck meets him halfway, an', say, mister, f'r th' next sixty seconds them boys is sure makin' hay. Then they wades into a clinch. The haberdasher model that's playin' ref'ree drags 'em apart, but they bumps him over in a corner, an' pr'ceed with th' balin'. It's an even break, both o' them is bleedin', an' th' crowd's a bunch o' ravin' imbecels.

"Then I notice somethin'. K. O. is slippin'. But there's somethin' else; Kentuck's doin' th' ole crawfish, an' I don't need nobody tuh tell me he's groggy. I jump up an' start yelpin' K. O. th' how's how, but he don't need no advice—no more'n I need wings. Zop! Out comes th' ole left, straight on th' point, followed by th' ole chloroform right. Zowie! It's a clean miss, an' before K. O. is right side up again Kentuck unwinds th' old Kid Farmer elevator, an' when it lands K. O. unravels his wings an' starts f'r th' gallery.

"After he had fell from th' roof, an' th' referee sees th' dent in th' canvas, he starts countin'; but he might just as well 'a' went home. K. O. stays down f'r ten counts, two dukes, an' fifteen minutes, an', when he finally comes outa it an' finds me moppin' his face he bawls me out f'r throwin' in th' sponge when they turned out th' lights. Can yuh imagine it?

"He's still ravin' when I get him tuh th' dressin' room; but, figurin' he's still goofy from th' skull practice, I let him rave. While I'm workin' him over Kentucky Kid comes into th' joint, smilin' high wide an' han'some. This kinda gets my goat—but right now I apol'gize. Kentucky Kid's a real gentleman; when he sees us havin' words he begs th' big pardon, backs out, an' says he'll see us in th' mornin'.

"Bein' out 'round ten thousand berries, that night don't find me no sleepin' beauty; an' seein' that K. O. wakes up in th' mornin' with an overload o' jaw—I have trouble keepin' my shirt on.

"'I can lick that bird—easy!' K. O. bawls; an' when I say nothin' he repeats.

"'I said I could lick that bird easy!' This time he's sarcastic, an' it don't go.

"'Sure,' I says; 'but why in hell didn't

yuh do it last night?' I asks him sorta snappy like.

"Countin' th' decoration, K. O.'s face goes patriotic, then it changes tuh a port red. I'm expectin' him tuh blow up an' bust me one, but he don't; instead he kinda laughs.

"'Why, yuh poor goof—couldn't yuh see I was pullin' my punches?'

"'Sure!' I tells him. 'Just like Carpentier pulled 'em on Dempsey!'

"F'r this I look tuh connect with K. O.'s right, but I don't. K. O. only sniffs, an' when he gets his mouth workin' he speaks low.

"'Wait till I fight him again!'

"'Wait!' I laughs. 'Why, yuh poor goof—anybody that would match yuh an' him 'd match Abe Atell an' Dempsey—together!'

"'All right,' he says; 'yuh win!' Then he gets snappy. 'How much yuh out on me?'

"I tells him, an' what does he do but hand me a I. O. U. f'r th' full amount? This sorta hurts me; I know ten thousand smackers ain't gonna bust him—he's been winnin' reg'lar, sinkin' his jack in good real estate, an' his paper's good as cash. But I don't want his jack. I took a chance, got a run f'r my money, an' ain't exactly where I'm beggin' tuh keep me outa th' poorhouse. I try tuh tell him this, but he don't listen.

"'Now,' he bellers, 'beat it 'fore I f'rget yuh look like *Rip Van Winkle!*'

"'Suits me!' I tells him; an' when I backs through th' door I take th' long chance. 'K. O.,' I says, 'if yuh ever fight that bird again, sign him up tuh come in handcuffed!' Then I grabs a rattler f'r this man's town—an' here I am!"

As far as Carrigan was concerned, this was the end of his story; yet he wanted some comment, sympathy, anything, and he turned his eyes to Walden, with the question:

"What d'you call it?"

"Tough luck," Walden said, nodding dolefully; "but if Kentucky Kid's got th' goods, why didn't yuh take him under yer wing?"

"Goods?" Carrigan grinned. "Why, th' way I got it figured, he was kiddin' us all th' time. Looks like he was just stallin' tuh get another fight; but when K. O. got rough he changed his mind. No, sir, mister; he's a Kentucky wonder—hadda be tuh clean up on K. O.!"

"Well," Walden offered, smiling, "he might be a champion! Grab him up; I'll match him with Kid Troubles. What say?"

"Mister," Carrigan chuckled, reaching for the telegraph pad, "I'll say th' next thing is tuh see if I can land him!"

II.

Two weeks later Kentucky Kid, signed for ten rounds with Kid Troubles, opened training quarters under the management of Jim Carrigan. The bout was only ten days off, but it was ample time for a regular fighter to get into condition; and the day of the fight, as Carrigan announced, Kentucky Kid was "right in th' pink."

That night was one never to be forgotten by the management of the club. The house was packed with a throng of eager fight-loving fans; they were there with a fight-or-money guarantee, and their lusty throats told the world that they expected fight.

A big crowd had come up from the South to pull for Kentucky Kid, and they strove to make the name of their favorite heard above the uproar.

Out in the dressing room, Kentucky Kid, fresh from the rubbing table, watched as Carrigan carefully taped his hands. His lithe body rippled with splendid, well-trained muscles, and his regular features were warped with a smile of confidence. Just as he slid to his feet, ready to enter the ring, Walden came rushing through the door. The matchmaker's face was pale, his fists were clenched, and he breathed heavily.

"Say!" he panted. "We're sure outa luck—can't find Kid Troubles nowhere! Gotta call th' fight off—er—er ring in a substitute!" He paused, searching the faces of both Carrigan and the fighter. "Might find a ham, an' by handlin' him easy we

could give th' crowd a run f'r their money. What say?"

Carrigan turned to his fighter. Kentucky Kid was smiling.

"Anything you all say, Mr. Carrigan!" he drawled to his manager's unspoken query.

Carrigan laughed. "My boy says he's right, Walden; so bring on y' ham, an' if yuh can't find a fighter bring on *Tarzan o' th' Apes!*"

Fifteen minutes later Carrigan and his fighter entered the ring. At sight of them the groaning crowd, led by the delegation from Kentucky, burst into a semblance of a cheer. A moment later the ham came down the aisle. In a bound he cleared the ropes, hurried straight into Kentucky Kid's corner, and presented himself before Carrigan's big, opulent form.

"Carrigan," he snapped, stabbing the manager with a pair of blue-bayonet eyes, "here's that jack I owe yuh—an' if yuh wanna double it, bet on me!" He dropped the money, grasped Kentucky Kid's hand, and hurried toward his own corner.

"K. O. Burns!" Carrigan gasped. "An' right in th' pink!"

Kentucky Kid nodded in amazement, but the next instant he flung a contemptuous sneer toward the retreating figure, and when the referee called them to the center of the ring he covered the space in a single bound.

With the tap of the first gong the crowd knew that they were to be more than repaid for any disappointment they had suffered. The fighters waived the handshake, coming out of their corners with flaying arms. Back and forth across the arena they crashed, fighting every inch of the way; and at the finish of the round their handlers were forced to drag them, snarling, into their corners.

Three rounds of this furious milling followed, with no slackening in the pace. It was any one's fight; the fighters themselves seemed to know it, and with the tap of the gong which marked the fifth round they toed together in the center of the ring and fought it out. Smash, bang, zam, zowie—crash! A tousled head, jabbed by a wicked left, lay back as though on a hinge—a flashing right came out, straight from the shoulder—and the next thing Kentucky Kid knew he was kayoed in Chicago.

A half hour later K. O. Burns, dressed and ready for the street, stepped into Kentucky Kid's dressing room. The Kentuckian was first to note his presence, and, stumbling forward, he grasped the battered fighter's hand.

"Fellows," he drawled, "Ah want you all tuh shake hands with K. O. Burns. His wife says he's th' next heavyweight champion! She says th' reason Ah beat him down in N'Orleans is 'cause Ah had him foul! Reckon so—though if he licked me he'd lose his gal. You all see—his wife's mah sister!"

"Sister, wife," Carrigan gulped, blinking wildly. "Well, I'll be—"

"Yep," K. O. interrupted, smiling broadly and thrusting his hand into Carrigan's big red paw; "but right now I need a manager bad. What say we team up again, Jim?"

"Suits me, K. O.," Carrigan grinned.

"All right," K. O. laughed, extending a strip of paper. "Find this box car an' unbutton it—"

"Box car?" The words came from Carrigan's lips in amazement.

"Yep," K. O. continued soberly. "I hadda hog-tie Kid Troubles an' lock him up tuh get this fight—an' I don't wanna go down there an' take any chances. I might bust one o' my hands!"

THE 156TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

McCARTY INCOG

By ISABEL OSTRANDER, author of "Twenty-Six Clues," etc.

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Orders at "K" Tower

By SYLVESTER WILLIAMS

THEY fixed the track that summer east of K Tower. Every time the Western Express went by the tower Matt Powers, the engineer, got an order on the fly which read something like this:

> Reduce speed to fifteen miles per hour at mile post 31.
>
> G. K. S.

"G. K. S." was the superintendent.

That was all very well. Many an express train thunders by a signal tower out in Indiana, picks up an order fastened in a wooden hoop, and the world remarks not.

When they put the Widow Hart in the tower the action began.

"Hell of a swell lookin' woman," remarked Matt to his fireman the first day the buxom form leaned out from the small wooden platform at the foot of the tower, and in the swirl of dust and smoke raised by the Limited faithfully hung the wooden hoop with the orders on Matt's arm.

"Yep," replied Red Sharffin, his fireman. "That's the Widow Hart with four kids."

And the next day when the Limited passed, Matt made a tremendous effort to throw the hoop, minus the orders, back out of the window "so the widow wouldn't have to walk so far to pick it up."

For a week the widow did her duty. Then one day before starting his run Matt Powers took a greasy piece of paper in his engine house terminal, and with the half remaining of that index finger of his wrote:

> I heered you are a widow with four kids. I am one to, but I got five.
>
> MATT THE ENGINEER.

When the hoop went back out of the cab window that day at K Tower the note was attached.

The following day, underneath the reduce speed orders handed up the Widow Hart, was penciled:

Your spellin' is awful. Educate your children.

Sincerely,

MAMIE HART.

An empty hoop went back out of the cab for the next two days. Then there was a council in the engineers' locker room at Matt's terminal. With the assistance of a couple of spare young engineers—Mike Knea, the engine house despatcher, and Tony Largello, the traveling fireman—a sure enough, handsomely worded note for the Widow Hart was ultimately penned. It ran:

LOVELY LADY:

Excuse the very negligent haste of my first communication, but the onerous duties of engineering this company's Western Express is my sole excuse for neglecting a so necessary art as that of spelling. Dear lady, I was once a happily married man. The demise of my wife two years back leaves me a forlorn man with five children to care for. I understand you are minus a husband. And may I inquire candidly your wishes concerning the annexation of another husband. Might an engagement to talk matters over some Saturday evening when both of us are off duty be suggested? R. S. V. P.

Yours truly,

MATT POWERS, ENGINEER.

The note was thrown off, and the reply below the slow orders promptly received the following trip. Here it is:

Be your natural self. You write as if you'd graduated from college overnight. I have a date every Saturday night. It is to wash all my kids.

Yours,

MAMIE HART.

Silence from the cab of the Limited for two days, then, on the returned hoop:

Wish I could stop some time. Ain't you ever goin' to marry? Ans.

MATT THE ENGINEER.

And the prompt reply next day was:

I might. But wash your overalls before you speak to me of matrimony. They're filthy.

MAMIE H.

The next trip the brass buttons on Matt's new overalls fairly sparkled. The note on the hoop read:

What is your ans. now? MATT.

And the reply from the widow next trip was:

What answer? You mean to my marrying you? Finish the cleaning up first. Your face is greasy. I can see it as you pass. I got four to wash Saturdays now. You don't think I'm going to take on another, do you?

M. H.

Matt's face was as clean and pink the next trip as a new-born babe's. And the note dropped read:

I had a bath, too. I just tell that so as to save more argument. Will you give me an answer now?

MATT.

And the widow replied:

You look very like a gentleman now. But I hardly think it proper to communicate in such a fashion as this regarding matrimony. Don't you think a personal conference is better? Maybe you swear a great deal. Do you?

Matt's note next day was laconic. It read:

Never swear. Will have a hot box to-morrow and stop.

MATT.

The next day some of the bored travelers on the Western Express when it suddenly halted gazed out of the window ahead at a blue-overalled fireman desultorily getting on and off an engine at a signal station with a big "K" on its side. If the passengers paid particular notice they might have seen the fireman throw pail after pail of water on a trailer box that seemed perfectly cool. And if the passengers, too, had

been really curious they might have seen the fat engineer of the train placidly sitting on the shady side of the tower talking with a fat, motherly lady dressed in a neat blue gingham. And the two didn't seem to say much, and Matt only made one break—as he told his fireman later. He said, "Hell, no!" when the widow verbally inquired if he swore. And they fixed up a date for Saturday night.

Well, the Widow Hart is now Mrs. Matt Powers; and the combined family of the two now numbers ten kids. No, indeed, not nine. I said, and meant it, ten. Ten kids.

Ten, that was, at last counting.

THE HARP

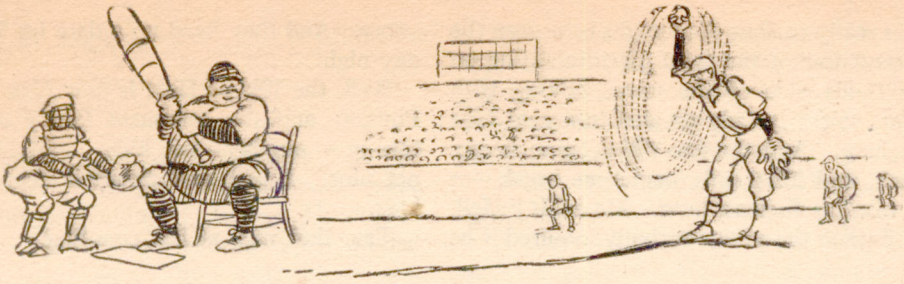
IN idle mood, and fond; in passioned call;
Your loved, caressing finger tips have touched
To living joy my soul. All-vibrant to your need,
I have sung for *you*. I have echoed; given voice
To thoughts too faery-spun for common word.
I have held your heart to pure desire, and I have thrilled
You to all-vital truth when sullen foes of faith
Have thronged your path and mocked you to despair.
I have wept while careless laughter
Curved your lip; I have served, and I have waited—dumb.
I, the master, slave to *you;*
Have given pearls—for tears. I have wooed and won;
But now—

Alone I wait; the gangrene of neglect
Has stained the silver and the gold.
My taut strung nerves are strained to breaking, and
The dust of old, dear memories falls:
Gray snow—where roses bloomed.

And yet; so strong is love in music wed;
In this my hermit-quiet retreat
Sometimes the moonbeams come.
They build for me a little palace of delight, and
Sometimes too, the south wind breathes
From some far-distant clime, and
I stir to eager, glad response. I feel
A tremor waft and twine about; along each sentient cord.
Some deft and spirit hand; the bridge of silence spans.
I sing, a song unknown to me, but sweet as trill of birds
At dawn. And then, while once again with hope
I throb; I question—ask: "Have *you* traversed the pass
From this clay-bondaged life? Have *you* returned to me?
Is it *you,* or is it some alien lover here
To seek my company?"

Am I, all-faithful, being called to mate,
Some stranger's tale with singing voice, and
Broken heart, or—
Have you come?

Dahlia Graham.



IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via W. O. McGEEHAN

THE BASEBALL PASTERS' UNION

I AM reading in the poipers that the baseballers is forming a union on account the magnets which owns the clubs ain't treating them right and they got a lot of griefinces. Everybody has got a lot of griefinces these days. I got something to holler about myseluf the way my business is going and the way the customers won't pay up.

Personally I nefer choined no union on account all of my people has been in business for themselufs, except maybe a few loafers among my relations who ectually woiked for wages. But I ain't saying much about the bleck sheeps of the femily, and I don't like to rettle the skelingtons in the dumb-waiter, which they have those skelingtons in efery femily.

Maybe the players has a kick coming. Take the case of that Baby Ruthstein, which he is only getting now about seventy-five thousand dollars a year and found during the baseballing season when business is good. When they gave it to him he was the champeen baseballer for making it run homes, and he said from the start it wasn't enough. I ain't talked much to none of the players yet, but I guess this will be one of the foist hollers that the wage scales is too low and that a hundred thousand dollars for the season should be the minimump. The minimump means the least a feller should get. Personally I would never take the minimump of anything.

Of course none of the baseballers has mentioned anything about this yet, but I know that where there is a union it is on account the fellers which they are choining it wants more celery. Fellers which is getting celeries is always wanting them raised like them two loafers which they are woiking for me. I would laugh out loud when I say " woiking " only it ain't no choke when you have to pay them off efery Saturday night yourseluf. When the shoes is on somebody else's feet it is a difference.

Living conditions is another thing which unions is always hollering about. I been inwestigating the living conditions from the baseballers, and they are pretty rotten. They are all the time treveling around the country in them Pullmanstein cars, and some of the new beginners which is chust loining the business hast to sleep in upper births. Three times a day they got to pick their own meals from the hotel bills of fare, and if they miss a meal the meneger sends the club doctor to see what is the metter with them. Of course it ain't often that a baseballer misses a meal on account he knows it would make the meneger start an inwestigation.

The woiking conditions is another thing to holler about. The averich baseballer has to woik nearly two hours a day and six days out of the week. Maybe he would come up to bet about four times in a game, and they nefer give him no assistent to carry the bet. Even a plumber has got it a feller to carry his suit case with the tools in it. That will be one of the foist hollers, I belief.

Also there has been some sad cases during last season where some of the pitchers has been made to pitch twice a week by them cruel slave drivers, which they call them menegers. Also when the game would go ten inninks they nefer gave them a cent for overtime. Ain't that enough to make a pitcher's blood chust boil over. You bet if I

WOIKING CONDITIONS IS GETTING TOUGH FOR HIM

was a pitcher and the game went into the tenth I would esk the meneger: "How about it? Is this a union ball club or is it an open shop?"

I don't know whether the thing would go so far that the players would call it a strike or not. You know how sensative the players is when anybody else calls it a strike on them, especially if it is one of the empires. Maybe they would go so far as the foist strike and they might even call a second one, but when it comes to a thoid strike I think the players would stop and look the situation over before they would do nothing else. A player chust can't bear to think about a thoid strike. That is where I think maybe them gresping magnets has got them in the hole, and you bet that they know it.

If Baby Ruthstein should walk out on account of a cut in his celery I bet that haluf of the benk presidents and railroad presidents in United States would walk right out with him. Fellers that get celeries like that wouldn't like to see them cheapened. That would make the conditions in this country terrible. Nobody would be hitting no run homes and nobody would be at the benk to take away your money or to send you woid that the morgitch is due, and you don't pay it before the fifteenth they would send around the sheriff with a dispossessing. You couldn't arger with none of them sheriffs, neither.

I shouldn't wonder if Baby Ruthstein would call it a strike, anyhow. Woiking

conditions is getting tough for him, anyhow, and the celery is hardly woith it. The trouble is on account there is too much room between the bases. Baby Ruthstein is getting wide around the middle chust like myseluf, and when a feller gets that way he don't like to walk much. The trouble is when Baby Ruthstein knocked one over the fences he has to walk all the way around and touch all of the bases with his feet. It is a pretty long trip after a feller gets tired stending out in the hot sun all afternoon.

Still you got to touch all of them three bases and the home dish with your feet. There was a feller wunst who didn't touch second, and eferybody said he was dumb. I don't think so. He was a smart feller who was looking ahead to the time when they wouldn't have to be so perticular. It would be one of the demands of the new union that a player wouldn't have to run all the way down to second if he was tired out. You could conceeded it the base chust like in goluf a feller would conceed it the hole, and a feller wouldn't be all tired out at the end from the game.

You couldn't expect it a feller which he is getting a celery of seventy-five thousand dollars a year to do the rough work. Does a benk president go ofer to the edding machine and edd up the figures when he is sending you the bill around for the interest? No, sir, he has a clerk edd up the figures and another clerk to put them down. Then he has an assistant which dictations a wery firm note, which they send it with the bill. No feller who gets a big celery does any hard work. The bigger is the celery the smaller is the work that is connectioned with it. Even a boss plumber has a lot of assistants.

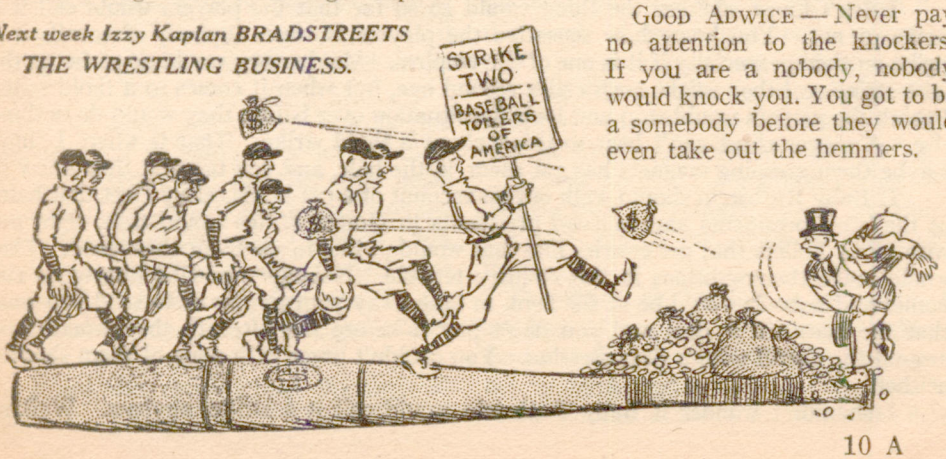
When Baby Ruthstein gets it his rights all he would have to do would be to sit on the bench and give it the directions, and belief me, when you start to get so round like me and Baby Ruthstein you can woik better sitting down.

All that the Baby will have to do when it comes his time to bet will be to give the orders to his assistants. He will say: "Jones, take bet No. 4 and hend it to Smith. White, as soon as Smith hits the ball over the fence you run around the bases. As soon as the run is scored come into box 13 and notify me. I will be there with a party of friends who would be anxious to know the result of the trensection on account they may have a little money bet on it."

Then he would call over his cheneral superintentent which he would have charge of all the helup. "Thomas," he would say, "you got to be more firm with the helup. Yesterday Smith didn't hit the ball far enough, and White didn't run fast enough so that he was caught out before he could reach the home dish. If this should occur again I should be forced to fire eferybody, inclusioning yourseluf. Carelessness about these little metters of detail I couldn't stend for. If things like this is going to heppen I might chust as well be out there myseluf."

Well, as I said in the foist place, I nefer had much use for them unions, and when the foist strike comes I am going to the magnets and take Baby Ruthstein's chob for the same celery. The photografting business is rotten now, anyhow, and I am chust as wide in the middle as Baby Ruthstein. I could got a couple of fellers to do the hitting and the running cheap.

Next week Izzy Kaplan BRADSTREETS THE WRESTLING BUSINESS.



GOOD ADWICE — Never pay no attention to the knockers. If you are a nobody, nobody would knock you. You got to be a somebody before they would even take out the hemmers.

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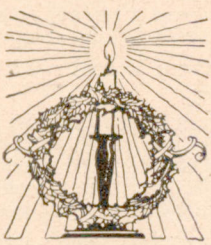

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